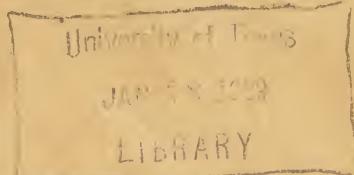


AMBASSADE DE BELGIQUE  
WASHINGTON, D. C.

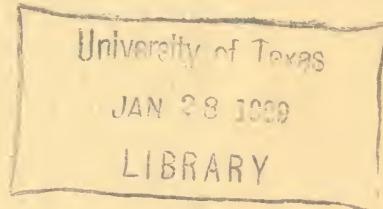
January 15, 1929.



The Belgian Embassy begs to enclose herewith the text of a report submitted to the Belgian Parliament by Mr. Emile Vandervelde during his term of office as Minister for Foreign Affairs, on the subject of the forced deportation of Belgian civilians during the German occupation of Belgian territory in the late war.

It has been thought that this report would bear an historical interest in view of the wide publicity given to the efforts of the German Reichstag to justify these deportations. For the accuracy of the historical record, this document contains extracts from the minority report of the Reichstag's sub-committee, condemning the deportations, as well as confidential letters from the German Governor General in Belgium, showing conclusively, from German documentary evidence, that the deportations were effected solely for military purposes and in defiance of the recognized laws of war and of the dictates of humanity.

LIBRARY  
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS



REPORT  
LAID BEFORE  
**THE BELGIAN PARLIAMENT**  
BY THE  
**MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

in Answer to the Reichstag Report on the Belgian Deportations (1916-1917) (1).

No measure taken by the German Government in occupied Belgium during the War has caused more suffering and protests than the wholesale deportations of Belgian workmen compelled to work in Germany and behind the Western German Front. This measure was decided upon in September 1916, applied at the beginning of October in the War zone (*Etapengebiet*) and, during the last week of the same month, in the territory administered by the Central Government. Its execution was pursued vigorously until February 1917 in the latter territory; it was continued without interruption in the War zone until the end of the hostilities.

A careful inquiry conducted in every commune by the Belgian Ministry of Justice provides the following figures regarding these deportations: In the territory of the Central Government, 58,500 men, a great number of whom were married, were sent to Germany; in the War zone, 62,155 people were transported close to the German Front, both in France and in Belgium. The total number of Belgian deportees, from October 1916 to November 1918, may therefore be stated to have been 120,655.

A memorandum, published by the Belgian Government, on February 1st, 1917, describes the condition of the deportees in the following terms: "The deportations have been coolly proceeded with by the occupying Power according to a pre-arranged plan, in spite of the most formal promises and assurances given to the population some time before by the highest representatives of the Imperial Government, notably by the Military Governor of Antwerp and by Governor-General Field-Marshall von der Goltz. Belgian families have been mercilessly broken up. Men of all ages (from 17 to 55 and over), of all conditions (depending on relief or in comfortable circumstances, unemployed or employed, many of them taken away from their work) have been removed in herds, transported under inhuman conditions to places which they are forbidden to make known to their fami-

(1) The first report of the Belgian Government deals with that part of the Reichstag Report regarding neutrality; a second Belgian report deals with part of the Reichstag Report regarding the Francs-Tireurs war.

ties, and compelled by force to do work dealing directly or indirectly with the War. Before leaving, they have to choose between a so-called « voluntary » engagement to work in Germany for an apparently high salary and deportation with the trifling salary of 30 pfennigs per day. Whether they sign or not, it means separation from their family. The overwhelming majority do not sign and even when deported refuse to work. They are then subjected to a horrible treatment made gradually worse and applied with a refinement of cruelty which was considered as belonging only to savages or people gone back to a savage state. Everything is done to conquer the resistance of these obscure heroes of patriotic duty who are subjected to hunger, thirst, cold and are forced to stand for hours or thrashed, threatened with imprisonment and death, struck with the butt-end of rifles. The Belgian Government has received reports on the sufferings inflicted on thousands of innocent men herded together and sorted like human cattle in German camps which must arouse indignation in every civilised being. The condition of those sent behind the German lines in Flanders and in France is perhaps worse. Compelled against their will to carry out painful duties in the open, during the worst season of the year, without any training for it, exposed to shell-fire, insufficiently clothed, scarcely fed, a great number of these people are soon overtaken by exhaustion and illness. Mortality amongst them seems considerable. The sick who can still be transported are sent back to their homes with less consideration than was shown to ancient slaves by owners who were directly interested in their welfare. The life of those who remained at work has been described by the men who have been invalidated home : it is nothing short of hell.

When these events took place, protests were heard even in Germany denouncing a crime which inflicted untold sufferings upon its victims and caused the death of thousands of them. It might therefore have been expected that the Reichstag Commission, instituted in 1920 to inquire into the violations of International Law of which the German Empire was accused during the War, would condemn this measure without questioning the facts and would seize this opportunity to release the German Republic from the responsibilities incurred by the Imperial Government.

The official report laid before the Reichstag has not realised these expectations. The minority of the Reichstag Commission, or more precisely of its Sub-Commission, declare in formal terms that the deportations to Germany and to the front of over 100,000 Belgian workers was an unjustifiable measure further aggravated by the manner in which it was carried out. But the majority are of a very different opinion. According to them, the deportations, as ordered by the German General Government of occupied Belgium, were, *on principle*, in accordance with the rules of International Law, notably with « the regulations of warfare on land annexed to the Hague Convention, considering that the deported workmen did not find sufficient employment in Belgium and that this measure was urgently necessitated in order to re-establish and maintain order in public life in the occupied territory ».

According to the German Commission, the justification of the deportations depends on a question of fact but, regarding this *question of fact*, the majority declare their inability to pass judgment considering, on the one hand, the involved character of military, social and economic conditions bearing on the subject, and, on the other, the fact that the two responsible rulers (the Imperial Chancellor and the Governor-General of Belgium) being deceased, it is impossible to discover to-day the determining motives which

prompted their action. Nevertheless, the majority consider themselves competent to declare that the protests of the Belgian and foreign Governments and the complaints of the Belgian population against the deportations were without foundation, with the exception of the excesses and errors committed in carrying out these instructions, mentioned above. In their conclusions, they express the wish that a fundamental rule founded on International Law should be framed controlling « the whole question of the possible internment and deportation of civilians in war-time », and that its authors « should take into account, as much as possible, the moral and humane considerations which were generally put forward against the use of brutal measures of this kind, made on both sides, during the world-war ».

As mentioned above, these conclusions of the majority have been strongly opposed by the minority. The latter, represented by Dr Levi and his political friends, sum up their opinion in the following terms :

« 1. The deportation of Belgian citizens to Germany took place mainly for military reasons and more particularly in order to realise the programme of armaments framed in the autumn of 1916. The Belgian deportees were intended to provide labour for industry or to allow of the release of men capable of taking part in military operations.

« 2. The deportations took place only for military reasons and not in order to maintain order in public life in Belgium. Command and of the leaders of industry who were behind it. The Military Higher Command urged this measure in spite of the risk of violating International Law. The Governor-General of Belgium carried it out and the Minister of Foreign Affairs recommended it knowing that it was contrary to Law.

« 4. The deportations were carried out with a harshness which the object of the measure did not justify. The deportees who were not given an opportunity to take leave of their families and to take with them the necessary clothing and food, were transported in winter, in non-heated goods trains, and no arrangements were made to house them. Many cases of death and illness may be attributed to the defective manner in which this measure was carried out. »

The conclusions both of the majority and of the minority have been the subject of a discussion in the Reichstag. The Assembly was divided like its Sub-Commission, but the point of view of the majority was defended by a member of the present Coalition Government, Dr Benn, who endeavoured to justify the deportations before German and World opinion. Under the circumstances, the Belgian Government consider it their duty to take part in the debate. From the first, they denounced the deportation and forced labour to which the Belgian workers were subjected. They were justified in thinking that, in this question at least, the Imperial Government's policy would not be vindicated. They could not leave unanswered this plea of justification, which is contrary both to law and to fact, without betraying their moral responsibilities.

Their answer will be found in the enclosed memorandum prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the collaboration of Mr. Passelecq, Avocat à la Cour d'Appel de Bruxelles. This memorandum, based on precise documents, completes the statement made by the Socialist members of the Reichstag Sub-Commission. All unbiased readers, after examining it, will

realise that the plea according to which the deportations were decided upon, either to reduce unemployment in Belgium or to maintain order, does not stand the test.

It will be seen that it was against the advice given by Governor-General von Bissing and under the pressure of the Higher Military Command and for purely Military reasons that the Imperial Government decided to condemn to deportation and to forced labour 120,000 Belgians, thousands of whom lost their lives or at least their health after undergoing terrible trials.

The Belgian Government are anxious to believe that the Germany of 1925 will give up justifying such acts or pleading extenuating circumstances and will understand, with the minority of the Reichstag Sub-Commission, that she has a high moral interest in disavowing them.

## APPENDIX

*The Minister of Foreign Affairs*

VANDERVELDE.

DOCUMENTS

DOCUMENTS	
A. Note on the deportations and forced labour inflicted by the German Authorities in the Belgian civil population, in the War Zone after the Imperial Decree of repatriation (Febr. 1917-Nov. 1918) . . . . .	31
B. Observations made in the state of health of the Deportees on their return from Germany and from the German front in Belgium and France . . . . .	42
C. Statistical report of the Deportees . . . . .	52
D. Confidential circular addressed by Governor-General von Bissing to the commandants of Beverloo and Maubeuge and to the Kreischesfs (May 15th, 1916) . . . . .	55
E. Confidential circular addressed by the same to the same (August 4th, 1916) . . . . .	56
F. Governor-General von Bissing's confidential memorandum on the project of wholesale deportation (September 25th, 1916) . .	58
G. Confidential letter of Governor-General, Baron von Bissing, to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg (November 25th, 1916) . .	64

## The Wholesale Deportation of the Belgian Population (1916-1918).

Before examining the report of the Reichstag Sub-Commission on the deportations, it is essential that its main features should be described.

This official document includes, first, the conclusion of the majority (pp. 193 to 197); secondly, a summary (two-thirds of a page) of the opinion of the minority (pp. 197 to 198), followed by a reply of the same length from the majority (p. 198). The majority deemed it opportune to add to these contradictory conclusions the full report of their expert, Dr Krieger (pp. 213 to 232), followed by seventeen appendices which will be examined further on. At the end of the document appears an account of the debate of the Sub-Commission on Dr. Krieger's report (pp. 285 to 442).

With regard to this account, it will be noticed that all documents showing the preponderant part taken by the Higher Military Command and by the leaders of German industries in initiating the deportations, have, without any exception, been brought to the notice of the Commission by members of the minority. It is doubtful whether, without their intervention, these very important documents would ever have been published.

### I.

It is not the intention of the Belgian Government, in their answer to Dr. Krieger's report, to reopen the controversy regarding the Hague « Regulation of warfare on land », in its application to the wholesale deportations of 1916, which was closed a long time ago (1). If the German Commission really thought to find in this judicial controversy a theoretical justification, this apparent advantage will be granted them. It will be sufficient to note that, according to the opinion of the Reichstag majority in 1927, the right justly recognized of the occupying Power to secure public order and to employ, if need be, for this end, compulsory measures, justifies in International Law the forcible transportation of 120,000 people, implying forced labour in the industries of an enemy country and in the defensive works of its army.

The only arguments which call for an answer from the Belgian Government are those bearing on the pretexts claimed by the Imperial Government in spite of all previous contradictions, to justify the use made in the deportations of the right of the occupying Power mentioned above.

The sufferings endured by individuals and by the whole nation during this terrible trial are beyond all question. The reports of eye-witnesses on which was based the « Mémoire du Gouvernement du Roi » of February 1st, 1917, have been confirmed by inquiries, made since the Armistice, by medical reports and by the irrefutable testimony of statistics (Cf. hereafter: *Documents A, B and C*). It is almost incredible that the Reichstag Sub-Commission of 1919-1927 should, like the Imperial Government of 1916,

persist in describing this cruel evil inflicted upon an inoffensive population as an act of great foresight and of almost providential statesmanship, as the very proof of the solicitude of the Occupying Power for public order, the future of the race, and all the other interest of a country exhausted by unemployment (1).

It is only too easy to show that such statements are contrary to fact.

### II.

It is true that, in 1916, the working classes of industrial Belgium suffered greatly from unemployment. But the paralysis of the Belgian workshops, partly due to the natural consequences of the War, was singularly aggravated by Germany herself. From the beginning of hostilities, in August 1914, she had adopted, under the inspiration of Rathenau, a vast scheme for absorbing into the economic life of the Empire all resources in raw material and in productive material of the occupied countries. This scheme had been systematically carried out. It included the removal from these countries, and notably from Belgium, of everything which could be used in Germany for the equipment of her workshops and for increasing her economic power. In Belgium this removal had been thoroughly proceeded with; no product which could be utilised by German war industries had escaped. Hundreds of successive decrees of seizure and confiscation had emptied most of the Belgian workshops of their motive power, machines, accessories and stock. At the same time, public finances had been ruthlessly exploited by the levy of enormous and ever increasing war taxes which were added to heavy fines. Agriculture and its produce had not been spared; the revictualling of the country had been jeopardised; and the curse of famine would have devastated the population without the intervention of a neutralised International Commission, the (Hispano-American) *Commission for Relief in Belgium*.

This scheme of methodical exhaustion seems to have been inspired, not only by military reasons, but also by the idea of ruining a competitor.

One irrefutable testimony will be sufficient to show to what extent it was carried out (2). In a confidential letter addressed, on November 25th, 1916, to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg, a copy of which fell, after the Armistice, into the hands of the Belgian Government (Cf. hereafter *Document G*), Governor-General von Bissing, wishing to justify himself before the Commander-in-Chief of the German Army of certain imputations of weakness which had been made against him at General Headquarters,

(1) Dr. Krieger in his report, and the Sub-Commission in its conclusions, admit that the deportations involved, in their execution, grave errors and harsh measures contrary to International Law. They contend, however, that the responsibility rests, on the one hand, with the local Belgian authorities which did nothing to help the German administration in the execution of the measure and, on the other hand, with tactless, over-zealous or ill-disposed subalterns, acting against the instructions of the Imperial authorities. The latter, as well as the Imperial Government, are thus declared by the Sub-Commission free from all responsibility.

(2) On the measure taken by the German administration in occupied Belgium to realise this scheme see: *Rapports et Documents d'actualité* (published by the Belgian Commission of Inquiry, Bruxelles-Liège, 1921-1923; 2nd and specially 3rd volume in two tomes), and the work of Count Ch. de Kerckove de Denterghem: *L'Industrie belge pendant l'occupation allemande (1914-1918)*, published in *L'Histoire Economique et Sociale de la Guerre mondiale (série belge)*, edited by the « Carnegie Fund for International Peace », under the direction of James T. Shotwell, professor of History at Columbia University, U. S. A. (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 1927.)

(1) An excellent refutation of the German judicial contention will be found in an article of the late J. van den Heuvel: « De la Déportation des Belges en Allemagne. » (*Revue Gén. de Droit international public*, 1917.)

and spirit of self-sacrifice, endeavoured to reduce to the minimum the evil consequences of the German Government's economic and military policy, this Government callously used its authority as Occupying Power to thwart their efforts. The negotiations with the British Government for the importation of raw material and the exportation of manufactured products were frustrated by impossible conditions and cavilling. The right of public authority to organise works of emergency (*Notstandsarbeiter*) was limited, and later suppressed, by a number of decrees and ordinances. Other decrees and ordinances were issued first to limit and later to forbid the grant of Belgian subsidies to the unemployed who, for patriotic reasons, refused to accept form the Occupying Power or from the employers paid by it any work concerned either directly or indirectly with the German Army. Various administrative measures were taken in order to facilitate the work of the *Industrie-Büro* organized to enlist the services of Belgian workmen for German industry in Germany; the decrees and ordinances of August 14th and 15th, 1915, obliged the Belgian workmen, under threat of penalty, to accept this kind of work in Belgium. The decrees and ordinances of May 15, 1916, strengthened the former by depriving the ordinary tribunals of their right to deal with these refusals to accept German work and by conferring it upon the German Military Courts, which were besides authorized to substitute for the penalty the enforced transportation to the place of work, even to Germany, of those who persisted in their refusal.

It seems evident that all these legislative, administrative and judicial measures were bound to provoke and maintain the evil of unemployment (1).

#### IV.

Did the German Government aim intentionally at obtaining this result? The facts in our possession do not up to the present enable us to solve this question, but it is not an unreasonable one. On the one hand, it would be most unlikely that the German Authorities in Belgium and in the Empire should have conceived and pursued such a definite economic policy without foreseeing its inevitable effects on the social and industrial life of the Belgian population. One must therefore assume that the Germans were fully aware of what they were doing. On the other hand, the Governor General must have had little inclination to give his unqualified assistance to the Belgians who endeavoured to suppress unemployment and to restore regular activity in the Belgian workshops. He had to take into account the special needs of German military interests during the war, and, at the same time, the considerations, which his Councillors had pressed upon him since 1914-1915, regarding the advantage which Germany might derive from the elimination of Belgian competition after the war.

He could not, and his own declarations prove that he did not, ignore the evident fact that the prolongation and extension of unemployment favoured the campaign pursued by the *Industrie-Büro* for the enlistment of Belgian labour in the service of the German war industry. Reduced to helplessness by continued inaction, the Belgian workmen must in the end have fallen an easy prey to the German recruiters.

These deductions are not purely hypothetical. The German Governor General's state of mind is clearly revealed by his apology of November 25th, 1916, to Field Marshal von Hindenburg (cf. hereafter *Demande justificatif G*). From the first month of Governor General von Bissing's administration, his attitude had already been revealed, as shewn by another secret document obtained during the war by Belgian patriots, and made known to the Belgian Government in 1918. It is the account of the deliberations of an important Conference held in Brussels, on June 19th, 1915, for the purpose of verifying and settling the basis of the German Governor General's economic policy in occupied Belgium (1).

In opening the sitting Governor General von Bissing himself takes care to define the leading principles of German policy in occupied Belgium. He gives first a general view of the state of agriculture and industry, the details of which are significant; we may summarize his declaration as follows: « The agricultural situation in Belgium is excellent. Large quantities of produce, notably vegetables, have been sent to Germany (for instance 300,000 kilogrammes of chicory during the spring). Measures are being taken to send to Germany sufficient quantities of fruit and even butter... Industry has suffered more. Belgium is an exporting country, but now all exports are stopped; raw materials are lacking, partly because, at the beginning of the war and prior to my administration, they were taken away ruthlessly; on the other hand, thousands of machines have been transported from Belgium to Germany to be utilized in the manufacture of munitions ». He announces his intention to « restore Belgian industry ». He has appointed an Economic Commission (the one which he is addressing) « in order to obtain full information before taking action ». But he immediately adds that he also intends « to work by these means in the interest of Germany » and that in reality his purpose is twofold: « In order to work in the interest of Germany, the present Commission must be assisted by the most authoritative representatives of German industry. It is with this object in view that you are gathered here. My purpose is twofold : first the welfare of Belgium — a squashed lemon is worthless; a dead cow gives no milk. But we must prevent the restoration of Belgian industry from harming German industry. With regard to his, a compromise must be found, whatever may be the future of Belgium, and this future I must request the orators not to consider for the present ».

This declaration unhappily was merely academic. The debates of the Conference and the events which followed in Belgium shew that in fact Germany's interests were foremost in the mind of the German authorities and that Belgium's interests were deliberately sacrificed. This is shewn by the following analysis of the German account:

Baron von der Lancken, Chief of the political section, repeats and confirms the principles put forward by the Governor General: « The restoration of foreign trade presents a twofold interest : the Belgian interest to employ the workmen and thus ensure tranquillity behind the front, the German interest (the manufacture of products useful to Germany without harming German industry) ».

(1) A summary of this document was published in 1918 by the Bureau Documentaire Belge de l'Arche and the document in full appears in vol. 3, tome II of the *Rapports et Documents d'enquête* (page 43), of the Commission belge d'enquête sur les violations du droit des gens, des lois et des coutumes de la guerre (Brussels and Liège, 1923).

(1) See *Rapports et Documents d'enquête*, vol. II, and F. Passelac : *Les Déportations belges à la lumière des documents allemands*, Paris, Berger-Levrault, January, 1917.

Dr von Lumm, General Commissioner of Banks, follows him : « From the beginning England has waged against us a merciless economic war. The English branches of German banks have suffered first. It was principally in Belgium that we had the means of taking measures of reprisal. Our interest was first to place the international financial relations of Belgium under the control of the German administration. The transfer of Belgian property to enemy countries had to be prevented. Belgium had to be maintained in a condition to support the occupying army and to bear a share of the general expenses of the war. That is why the control of the banks was established. »

After a long report by Dr. Jungst, a high German official, on the general economic resources of Belgium before the war, Mr. Schweighoffer rises to declare that he is impatient to state the views of German industry, before listening to further reports. He also agrees with Governor General von Bis sing concerning the principles which must govern the economic restoration of Belgium. But, while insisting on the necessity for such restoration, he declares that the effect of all measures to be taken on the present economic condition of Germany must be taken into account : « It is sufficiently known that the circumstances, before the war, gave Belgium such a strong position and made of her such a dangerous competitor of Germany in the world markets were her cheap labour and the smaller burden laid upon her by taxation and social charges ; and it is beyond doubt that the conditions which immediately influence to-day the economic position of German war industry are the control of Belgian industrial exports, the acquisition of raw and auxiliary materials and, above all, the emigration and transportation of Belgian workmen to Germany. »

Other representatives of German industry immediately apply these general principles to their respective industries : Messrs. Kirdorf and Bornhardt to the coal industry; von Borsig and von Prondzinski to the cement factories. It is decided that Belgium must not be authorized to produce for export in order not to injure the competitive interests of Germany (1).

In its debate on the influence of requisitions on the economic situation of the country the Commission shews the same kind of preoccupation. Declarations made by Messrs. Langen and von Lumm explain in detail that, with regard to the textile industry, German requisitions put a total stop to production by removing raw material. Mr. von Lumm estimates over a million francs the value of this class of goods requisitioned without having yet been paid for.

These various considerations, taken only from German sources, throw a certain light on the real principles which directed the economic policy of the German General Government since the beginning of the occupation of Belgium.

V.

Following the conclusions of Dr. Krieger, the Reichstag Sub-Commission thinks it possible to eliminate all relation of intentional, or even accidental, cause to effect, between the Imperial economic policy and the unemployment and consequent deportation of Belgian workmen. It is contended that German requisitions of materials and stock could not exercise any influence in 1916 since they dated from 1914; i. e. two years before the decree of general deportation.

This argument does not stand the test of facts. From 1915 to October 1916 the German requisitions, without being — and for good reason — as extensive as during the first months of the occupation, were pursued, being constantly applied to new products, exhausting the last stocks, increasing the proportion of material liable to seizure and causing further workshops to be closed. The schedule of German decrees regarding the list of stocks, the seizures and requisitions, has been published with references in the *Bulletin officiel des lois et arrêts allemands*, by the Belgian Commission of Enquiry (*Rapports et documents d'enquête*, vol. 3, tome III).

It contains 4 decrees in 1914, 20 in 1915, 57 in 1916, 39 in 1917 and 8 in 1918. This shews that the requisitions were carried on uninterruptedly during the whole war, involving a corresponding increase in unemployment. It must therefore be recognized that the Imperial German Government must be held greatly, and even mainly responsible for the social curse of unemployment which was to be used to justify the so called remedy of deportation.

Every impartial observer must be struck with the inevitable chain of circumstances produced by the acts of the German administration in its economic policy towards occupied countries. Did Rathenau himself expressly consider the removal of labour, after that of material and stocks, in his scheme for the unification of Germany's economic war policy, including the absorption of all the resources of occupied countries in the general pool of the Empire? It has not yet been possible to elucidate this historical point. But it is possible to say that the imposition of forced labour on the civil population in occupied countries formed part of the general scheme and was included in its guiding principles as consequence is implicitly included in its cause. All the legislative and administrative acts of the German General Government in Belgium present a perfect continuity of purpose; its progressive development leads to general deportation by a logical and uninterrupted gradation. So much so that, when the measure was decided upon to take effect simultaneously at the end of September, 1916, in all the countries occupied by the German Armies, the Governor General of Belgium did not need to draw up any new decree. He had already prepared the measure when, under urgent pressure of General Headquarters, he had instituted, by his decree of May 15th, 1916, the deportation even to Germany as an *individuel* penalty for the Belgian unemployed who persisted in refusing German work (1). He had only, in October, 1916, to extend, by means of interpretation, the practical application of this decree, in order to make it the legislative foundation of the *wholesale* deportation of all Belgian unemployed and of all those whom the occupying authorities might be pleased to consider as such.

(1) In an article by Dr. Goetze, of Berlin, Syndic of the Union of German Glassworks Owners, published in the *Wirtschaftszeitung der Zentralbüro* of November 18th, 1916, the author points out with evident satisfaction that the improvement of the German glass industry was due to the efforts made by German industrialists to eliminate Belgian competition in Germany and in neutral countries. He reveals that the owners of German Glass-works obtained from the Imperial civil administration the withdrawal of certain measures which had been framed in order to rescue a certain activity to Belgian glassworks, as well as a decree forbidding the transport and export of Belgian glass.

V.

VI.

One fact emerges from all these considerations : it is that the idea of using official compulsion in order to subject Belgian labour to the industrial war work of Germany, whether direct or indirect, was not conceived all at once in September 1916, under the pressure of sudden and unforeseen events. The general measure decreed and applied at that date in no way assumed the character of a chance expedient, of an administrative improvisation, but that of a premeditated action, methodically accomplished. The vicissitudes of military operations were not its cause, but merely its pretext. The interests of the German armies, the ever increasing exigencies of war provided the German Government with its motive and immediate purpose.

The measure had been duly foreseen ; its possibility had already been examined in the first year of the occupation, during the debates of the Economic Conference of June 19th, 1915, the account of which has been quoted above. At that time the importance of military levies in Germany, their projected extension and the immense development which had to take place in the plant of German war industry had already begun to raise for the Empire the problem of a corresponding increase in labour. In order to fill the gaps made in the German workshops by military recruiting, and to provide for their constant increase, the Imperial administrative authorities and the leaders of German industry had conceived the idea of borrowing from Belgium her workmen, whether willing or unwilling.

On June 19th, 1915, Mr. Bittmann, the representative of the German authorities, expressed himself substantially as follows : Contrasted with the ever increasing lack of workmen in Germany, unemployment in Belgium is very wide spread. About 500,000 Belgian workmen remain inactive. Replying to a proposal by the Ministry of War, the Governor General considered this question in March of this year, and informed the German mine owners and leaders of industries that they could apply to Brussels if they were in need of labour ; and in many cases this was done. Many industries sent representatives. This question, however, soon became very much involved. It was wrongly assumed in Germany that it was possible to place any number of workmen, belonging to any special trade, at the disposal of German industry. German industry will only be able to obtain Belgian workers, through a systematic enlistment. We must proceed very cautiously. Any appearance of intervention on the part of the authorities must be avoided, for it would immediately provoke a nationalist reaction among the working classes. The difficulty has been further increased by military considerations. It is impossible to send workmen to Germany forthwith. The Ministry of War and Military Headquarters demanded that the workmen should be placed under strict police control ; it was even sometimes requested that the workmen should be obliged to sign a contract before leaving for Germany... Several German concerns, especially in the iron industry, applied to Belgium, and the Administration placed itself at the disposal of their agents in order to assist them in their work of enlistment. The selection of these agents was very difficult ; sometimes directors, sometimes foremen, were sent to Belgium. In most cases it was impossible to obtain engagement contracts. Other difficulties occurred ; it was soon observed that the recruiting agents were not always capable. Some of them who wished to obtain a result at any price offered very high

salaries, and provoked, notably in the region of Liège, considerable agitation. Strikes occurred ; owing to public irritation, which necessitated the intervention of the local authorities, the latter looked askance on the work of enlistment. It therefore became necessary to consider whether it would not be preferable to unify this work. A start has already been made in this direction. When new agents came to Belgium and asked for particulars it was pointed out to them that it would be advisable for them to keep in touch with already existing organizations and to collaborate with them. I insist on this point, for it is the only way in which it will be found possible to transfer to Germany a sufficient proportion of the 100,000 workmen who cannot find employment here. »

On this point Governor General von Bissing made the following remarks : « In my opinion the question of labour is of paramount importance for Belgium as for Germany. I could only congratulate myself if a large number of workmen were transferred to Germany with their families : but it must be proceeded with by methods less clumsy than those which have been used up till now. I urge that people should not come to Belgium with the expectation that they will be able to collect together several thousand workmen and take them back with them to Germany. It is inexpedient to send here agents who deceive the workmen by holding out hopes which can never be fulfilled. I ask for the establishment of an organization which, in agreement with the Governor General, will draw up a scheme for the transfer of Belgian workmen to Germany. I have gathered the impression that until now Belgian workmen were strongly prejudiced against going to Germany, even when good wages were offered. If this feeling has altered it is probably owing to the pressure which I have exerted unofficially on the *Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation*, which was one of the main obstacles against the return to work. I made it very clear to this Committee that I should intervene energetically if it proceeded to give relief to workmen unwilling to resume their occupations and to provide money notably to those who refused to go to Germany. I obtained from the leaders of this Committee the assurance that bread will no longer be provided gratuitously, but must be paid for by the workman out of his wages. » It must be remembered that while these declarations, shewing that most of the Belgian workmen had been transferred to Germany through engagements extorted by deceit, threats or violence, were made in the secret Conference held in Brussels on June 19th, 1915, the Imperial Government, through its propaganda services, proclaimed abroad and through its own press that these workmen had signed their engagements of their own free will, and were receiving good salaries. Attention must also be drawn to the fact, admitted by Governor General von Bissing, that, in order to overcome the reluctance of the Belgian working class to work for the enemy, the threat of hunger was used, by forbidding the *Comité de Secours et d'Alimentation* to provide relief for those who refused to be enlisted for work in Germany.

Towards the end of the sitting the question of using Belgian labour in Germany, if need be through force, was raised again. Mr. Rahzen, representing the German engineering industry, pointed out that this industry « was in terrible need of labour » an that « the possibility of transferring Belgian workmen to Germany and the conditions of such transfer ought to be examined. « I am aware », he added, « that the men in engineering workshops are especially reluctant to go for a time to Germany because the Belgian engineering industry is making great sacrifices to retain the services of its skilled workmen. It would be in the interests of German industry to

examine whether, according to the considerations put forward by the Governor General, it would not be expedient to reduce the relief granted to them by the Communists and by Neutrals, especially by the American Commission for Relief. I should be very grateful if German industry could be reassured on this point. »

After a delegate from the German Administration, Mr. von Borsig, had given a few statistics, Governor General von Bissing himself undertook to answer Mr. Rahzen; his answer closed the discussion.

*The Governor General.* « The greatest resistance is found in the engineering industry because this industry is most closely connected with the war. We have met with many difficulties which are further increased by the fact that, especially in the engineering industry, a large number of machines have been removed. I do not wish to consider whether it was wise to proceed with such extensive removals from the beginning of the occupation. I believe that, if the conditions prevailing in Belgium had been more taken into account, it would have been possible to organize the engineering industry to the greater benefit of German interests. Resistance is in any case very great. It is true that this resistance is stronger among the owners than among the workmen, and, as the former provide the latter with relief, thanks to the large amount of capital at their disposal, it will not be easy to transfer to Germany the workmen of this industry. Exertion of pressure on the workmen opens gloomy prospects from the military point of view, and causes me some anxiety. The attempt which we have made with the railwaymen has failed completely. Another attempt has yielded better results. The railways were in great need of labour and it seemed for a time improbable that we should succeed in effecting the necessary repairs to the railway material. Some workmen who had shown evident bad will were transferred to Germany as civil prisoners. I then communicated with the Commanders of the prisoners camps and asked them to exert strong pressure on these deported workmen in order to oblige them to work. After a certain time they were asked if they were willing to sign an engagement in order to resume their work in Belgium, as free workmen. They all signed, and, if the Ministry of War approves my action, they will soon return to their workshops and resume their work. »

It will be noticed that there is no trace, in these declarations made *in camera*, and therefore sincere, of the idea that deportation constitutes a social cure for unemployment. The scheme is merely suggested as a means of alleviating the lack of labour in a German industry entirely devoted to the war interests of the Empire.

## VII.

Other secret German documents quoted in this statement show that the so-called social conception of the deportations remained for a long time outside the consideration of the German administration. During the second half of 1915, and the first nine months of 1916, this administration never examined the question from this point of view. The same is true *a fortiori* of the German Higher Command and of the leaders of German industry. The idea that the wholesale deportation of the Belgian unemployed, with forced labour in Germany, appeared suddenly to the German authorities, at the end of September, 1916, as the only means of fulfilling towards them their so-called social duty was merely a pretext invented after

the fact in the hope of concealing from world public opinion the true reason for this measure : to subject the labour of occupied countries to the service of German military interests in spite of all considerations based on International Law and even in flagrant violation of this Law.

The so-called urgent necessity to safeguard public order by removing from the country a mass of men whose enforced idleness was supposed to be a source of danger behind the front is another pretext, less odious perhaps, but no better founded than the first. The Belgian population was peaceful and absolutely disarmed; all men of military age were obliged to report themselves periodically to the *Meldemauer*. Occupied Belgium depended on the outside world for her food; the German administration controlled all imports and transports; in case of trouble a telephone call could have stopped all food transport and starved the whole country.

If riots or revolts on the part of the unemployed were to be feared, it is evident — and the debates of the Economic Conference of June 19, 1915, shew that this was General von Bissing's opinion — that to force the Belgians to undertake work repugnant to their patriotic feelings was more likely to lead to an explosion of these feelings than to their suppression. It is also evident that, if collective deportations had appeared the only means of preserving public order, the removal of 60,000 men, out of a total of some four of five hundred thousand unemployed (1), from the Governor General's territory, and by successive levies during sixteen weeks, was not likely to fulfil this purpose. Such a half measure would on the contrary precipitate the threatened trouble and cause an explosion.

In point of fact no sedition ever broke out, no trouble ever arose in any part of Belgium during the whole duration of the German occupation. Governor General von Bissing, in his confidential apology of November 25th, 1916, speaks of « the calm and good order prevailing in the country » as one of the happy results of his administration. He declares himself convinced that the prevailing feeling among the Belgian population is « a great lassitude of war and a general aspiration towards peace » (cf. hereafter *Document justificatif G.*).

The falsity and duplicity of the German official justification, based on the supposed danger of unemployment to public order and tranquility, appear still more clearly in an explicit admission made by Governor General von Bissing. In his secret memorandum of September 25th, 1916 (cf. hereafter *Document justificatif F*), the Governor General explains the working of his decree of May 15th, 1916, instituting deportation as an individual penalty for refusal to undertake work in the interests of Germany, and sums up the confidential circulare addressed by him to the Military Governors, to the Commanders of Beverloo and of Maubeuge and to the *Kreis-chefs* to secure its execution. He recalls the true reasons for his decree (lack of labour in Germany and desire to supply it) and the conditions required for the regular application of the penalty (the man to be deported must be needed for a specified task, and sufficient control at the place of work must be ensured). He further declares that he has instructed his subordinates to « give as official reason for the deportation that the unwilling worker, or the body of unwilling workers, render doubtful the maintenance of order and tranquility in occupied territory ». *Als offizieller Grund der Abschiebung soll angegeben werden dass der Arbeitsunwillinger bzw. die*

(1) Figure adopted by the German Sub-Commission

*Masse der Arbeitswillingen in dem besetzten Gebiete die Erhaltung der  
Ordnung und Ruhe in Frage stellen.)*

The German administration is here caught red-handed in elaborating the theme of its official justification (1).

To sum up, no admissible lawful reason existed, under the circumstances prevailing at the time, to justify the measure of wholesale deportation. From whatever standpoint we consider the question, the same truth is obvious : the deportations are imputable solely to the long premeditated resolution to procure at any price for German industry the labour essential to maintain its full capacity of production for military purposes, labour which was lacking owing to the extreme development of its plant in order to satisfy the demands of the Higher Military Command and owing to the calling up of all the German workers who had first been mobilized for service in the workshops. These inevitable conclusions are based not only on Belgian but also on German documents.

### VIII.

The documents at our disposal are sufficiently complete to enable us to appreciate a contradictory debate. They countercheck each other, the value of the German documents being rendered all the more evident from the fact that these *confidential* documents concur with the Belgian documents in contradicting the *official* assertions of German war propaganda, repeated to-day, in some cases almost word for word, by the majority of the Reichstag Sub-Commission following Dr. Krieger's report. The latter only succeeded in giving a semblance of soundness to his thesis through the most flagrant error of method. He bases his argument on a one-sided and incomplete documentation and ignores, in his report, the greatest part of the Belgian documents whether contemporary to the facts or published after the Armistice; he also ignores or deliberately sets aside the confidential documents of the German Administration of occupied Belgium, of the Imperial Government and of the Higher Military Command.

Anyone more or less familiar with the main features of the case must be struck with the extremely limited character of the documentation analyzed by Dr. Krieger in his report. The only *Belgian Documents* which he reproduces in his appendix are the following :

- “ Letter from the Archbishop of Malines to the Governor General of Belgium concerning the suspension of the deportations and the return of the deportees (October 19th, 1916);

(1) Let us also mention the precautions taken by the Governor General in order to induce the Belgian population not to suspect that his decree of May 15th, 1916, exposed them to deportation ever to Germany. The text of the decree was intentionally vague with regard to the place of work where the « unwilling to work » might be deported. Everyone in Belgium must have thought, and actually did think, that the decree referred only to transportation within the country. This mistake of the public opinion served the political purpose of Governor General von Bissing, who feared above all the enormous moral reaction which the deportation to Germany could not fail to cause in Belgium and abroad. Far from desisting it, he did everything to encourage it. To his *confidential* circular of the same date, May 16th, 1915, in which he explained to his subordinates that the penalty of « deportation to the place of work » was intended to procure by force Belgian labour in Germany he added this remarkable recommendation : « I especially draw your attention to the fact that the present instructions must be treated as strictly confidential and must not fall into unfriendly hands.

) Letter from the Bishop of Liège to the Governor-General of Belgium concerning the grievances of certain Belgian workmen with regard to deportation of October 18th (October 19th, 1916);

) Protest from the Deputies and senators of Mons against the deportations (November 2nd, 1916);

) Extract of the Belgian part of the list of culprits, accompanied by the decisions of the Reichs Court. ;

All told, four Belgian documents.

Dr. Krieger thus leads those who read his report, without reading the accounts of the Commission's debates in which the contradictions of the minority are swamped, to believe that the only protests made by the Belgian population against the deportations are the letters of Cardinal Mercier, Mons. seigneur Rutten and the Deputies and Senators of Mons.

It seems, however, difficult to believe that he should not have known or consulted the innumerable protests made in October, November and December 1916, in January, February, April and May 1917, in March, August and October 1918 by all the constituted authorities of occupied Belgium : protests of judicial bodies, protests of Universities and scientific bodies, repeated protests of Cardinal Mercier and of the Episcopates (among them, the famous « Cry of Alarm of the Belgian Bishops to Public Opinion » of November 7th, 1916, and the lengthy correspondence between Cardinal Mercier and the Governor General of Occupied Belgium), protests of the Municipalities, numerous protests of Ministers of State, Senators, Deputies, *Députations permanentes* and provincial Councils of all the Provinces, protests of the Labour Unions of all opinions (notably the moving « Appeal of the Belgian workmen to the workmen of all civilized countries » of November 10th, 1916), protests of the industrial leaders, appeal of the Belgian women to the women of neutral countries, etc.

The multiplicity of these protests, arising from all parts of the country and emanating from all notabilities and from every organization, together with the answers which Governor General von Bissing thought fit to make to them, is sufficient proof of the intense and wide spread emotion provoked by the deportations throughout Belgium. By reducing his references to only three of these documents Dr. Krieger — whether intentionally or not — suppresses one of the most characteristic features of the scandal provoked everywhere. He thus obtains an indirect advantage by reducing the affair to the proportions of a vague conflict arising out of the Occupation and by stripping it of the immense moral importance attached to it by Belgian and foreign opinion. Such an omission is all the more inexplicable that all these protests have been included, during the War and since the Armistice, in a series of publications of capital importance for the history of this period. It will be sufficient here to quote two of these works as examples :

I. *La Correspondance de S. E. le Cardinal Mercier avec le Gouvernement Général pendant l'occupation : 1914-1918*, published in 1919 by Mr. F. Mayence, Professor at Louvain University (vol. in-12, tome XII, p. 506, Brussels and Paris, 1919). This work contains (pp. 281-330) all the documents of the very active discussion of the German thesis on the deportations which was pursued, in 1916 and 1917, between His Eminence the Archbishop of Malines, speaking with the authority conferred upon him by

- his office and his position as an eye-witness, and the German Governor General in Brussels. The following is the list of these documents :
- a) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to Governor General Baron von Bissing (October 19th, 1916);
  - b) Covering letter to the preceding to Baron von der Lancken (October 19th, 1916);
  - c) Answer from the Governor General (October 28th, 1916);
  - d) Cry of Alarm of Belgian Bishops to Public Opinion (November 7th, 1916);
  - e) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to Governor-General von Bissing (November 10th, 1916);
  - f) Answer from the Governor General (November 23rd, 1916);
  - g) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to the same (November 29th, 1916);
  - h) Answer from Baron von der Lancken (December 8th, 1916);
  - i) Another answer from the same (December 9th, 1916);
  - j) Instructions from Cardinal Mercier to his clergy regarding the deportations (December, 1916);
  - k) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to the German Bishops (January 23rd, 1917);
  - l) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to Baron von Huene, Acting Governor General (January, 24th, 1917);
  - m) Answer from Governor General von Bissing to numerous demands by Cardinal Mercier for the repatriation of deportees (February 12th, 1917);
  - n) Letter from nineteen priests of Malines to Colonel Pohlman, *Kreischef* of Malines (December 24th, 1916);
  - o) Letter from Baron von der Lancken to Cardinal Mercier (January 28th, 1917);
  - p) Answer from Cardinal Mercier to the same, and letter from Baron von Huene, Acting Governor General (January 31st, 1917);
  - q) Request from Cardinal Mercier and numerous members of the political and judicial world of business circles and of the highest ranks of Belgian society to Emperor William II asking him to put a stop to the deportations (February 14th, 1917); (1)
  - r) Letter from Cardinal Mercier to Baron von der Lancken pointing out the lamentable condition of the repatriated deportees (April 28th, 1917);
  - s) Answer from Baron von der Lancken (May 1st, 1917).

Dr. Krieger only reproduces, in his appendix, one of these documents : the first. He only mentions one of the others, which are equally necessary to enable the reader to obtain an exact and complete idea of the facts of the debate and to appreciate the value of the contending arguments.

- II. *Les Protestations des Parlementaires belges*, in-4°, 102<sup>e</sup> pages, Brussels, 1918. The following documents included in this publication refer to the deportations :
1. Letter from the Ministers of State, Senators and Deputies residing in Brussels to Governor-General von Bissing (November 9th, 1916) with a covering letter addressed to the diplomatic representatives of the Foreign Powers in Brussels (November 16th, 1916);
  2. Translation of Governor General von Bissing's answer to the above letter (November 16th, 1916);

(1) This request is merely mentioned in Dr. Krieger's report.

3. Reply from the Belgian Ministers of State, Senators and Deputies to Governor General von Bissing (November 28th, 1916); with a covering letter addressed to the diplomatic representatives of the Foreign Powers in Brussels (November 28th, 1916);
  4. Letters from the Senators and Deputies of Mons to Governor General von Bissing (November 2nd, 1916);
  5. Translation of the Governor General's answer (November 9th, 1916);
  6. Reply from the same to the same (November 27th, 1916);
  7. Letter from the Senators, Deputies, *Députés permanents* and Provincial Councilors of the Province of Namur to Governor Général von Bissing (November 27th, 1916);
  8. Letter from the Senators, Deputies and notabilities of Antwerp to Governor General von Bissing (November 7th, 1916) and reply of the same (December 12th, 1916);
  9. Letter from the Senators and Representatives of Ghent to the President of the Civil administration of Flanders (December 1st, 1916);
  10. Letter from the Ministers of State, Senators, and Deputies residing in Brussels to Chancellor Hertling protesting against the levy of workmen in the War Zone and their deportation close to the Front (March 12th, 1918);
  11. Appeal to the Marquess of Villalobar, Minister of Spain, against the deportation of civilians from the War Zone to the Front (August 6th, 1918);
  12. Letter from the Ministers of State, Senators and Deputies residing in Brussels to Chancellor Max von Baden protesting against the forcible enlistment in the War Zone of non-combatants for war work (October 10th, 1918), with an appendix quoting certain precise examples of forced labour in enemy country.
- Out of these twelve important documents (1), all equally necessary for the appreciation of the facts and of the arguments invoked on both sides, Dr. Krieger only reproduces one — the fourth. He does not even quote the others as references and contents himself with stating in a general way (page 211) :
- « The deportations of workmen from Belgium have provoked in enemy and neutral circles great reproaches which have found expression partly in the action taken by several Governments and partly in the complaints of the Belgian population. »
- And further (page 213) :
- « With regard to the complaints from the Belgian population, we are in possession of three requests addressed to Governor General Baron von Bissing first by the Archbishop of Malines, Cardinal Mercier, dated August 19th, 1916 [sic; instead of October, 1916] (Appendix XIV), the second by the Bishop of Liège with a statement by groups of Belgian workmen (Appendix XV), and the third by Deputies and Senators of Mons dated November 2nd, 1916 (Appendix XVI). »
- This statement is followed by an analysis of these documents which are themselves reproduced in full in the appendices.
- The reader will judge whether such a fragmentary reference to the Belgian documents can be considered as an objective method of discussion, when compared with the bibliographical details given above.
- Dr. Krieger analyses, and reproduces in the appendices to his report, three protests from the Belgian Government (November 10th, 23rd and 28th,

(1) The text of other similar protests has been published by F. Passeelecq: *Les Déportations belges à la lumière des documents allemands* (Paris, Berger-Levrault, January 1917).

1916), as well as the protests and requests of foreign Governments (Holy See, Spain, Holland and the United States) but he does not quote the

*Mémoire du Gouvernement du Roi sur la déportation et le travail forcé de la population civile belge ordonné par le Gouvernement allemand* of February 1st, 1917, a document of primary importance in which the German thesis is refuted; this *Mémoire* is not even mentioned. Such an omission is all the more remarkable that Dr. Krieg seems inclined to exploit the fact that the deportations of workmen, out of which, after the war, there arose a series of individual inculpations in the *Liste des personnes dont la libération était demandée en vertu des art. 228-230 du Traité de Versailles et du Protocole du 28 juillet 1919*, are not mentioned in the « Report presented to the Preliminary Peace Conference » by the « Commission of Enquiry into the Responsibility for the War » of March 20th, 1919; this Report was « kept secret by the Allied Governments in spite of the fact that it should have mentioned all cases in which, in the opinion of the Commission of Experts instituted by the enemy powers, violations of International Law had been committed during the war by the Germans ». Dr. Krieg seems to hint that this silence must mean that the Allied Powers and the Belgian Government doubt whether the deportation of Belgian workmen constitutes in reality a breach of International Law, while the Belgian and Allied Governments never ceased to denounce it as one of the gravest violations of this Law and perhaps as one of the least excusable of all those committed by the Germans during the war.

Neither does Dr. Krieg quote the works published during the war, under the patronage of the Belgian Government at Havre, which reproduced a number of German documents contradicting the assertions of German propaganda and compared them with the facts, and the Belgian protests. A still graver omission is that of the official work carried on by the « (Belgian) Commission of Enquiry into the violations of the rules of International Law and of the Laws and Customs of Warfare » which are collected in four quarto volumes, divided into five tomes, published in 1922 and 1923 under the title of *Rapports et Documents d'Enquête*. This work summarizes, with evidence both German and Belgian, the result of an enquiry which lasted several years, and notably the important enquiry made by the Justices of the Peace under the instruction of Mr. Emile Vandervelde, the Minister of Justice. Two tomes (vol. III) of this important collection are devoted to the economic policy of Germany in occupied Belgium, and one tome (vol. II) to the deportations. Dr. Krieg's report does not contain any allusion which might lead the reader to suspect the existence of this official publication

IX.

The most serious feature of Dr. Krieg's report, revealing the defect of his critical method, and calling down upon him and upon the majority of the Sub-Commission the most severe judgement, is the omission, in his personal quotations and analysis, of the German documents concerning the dominant part played by the Higher Military Command (I). As already noted these documents were only laid before the Commission through the intervention of the members of the Minority; Dr. Krieg took part in the discussion which followed concerning their value, but he had not taken them into consideration in the Report which he had drafted preparatory to the debate. It is difficult to imagine that, in a historical trial of such scope, an important body like the Reichstag Commission and its expert should have put aside, in their investigations, and should have omitted to mention, in their comments and conclusions, the very documents from the archives of their own Government the confidential character of which must have reflected the innermost thoughts and revealed the true motives of the responsible authors of the measure.

The reason given by the majority of the Sub-Commission for their doubtful attitude regarding the reasons which determined this measure is that the two persons who share the gravest responsibility in this affair, Governor General von Bissing and Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, are now deceased, and that the Commission is thus deprived of the benefit of their evidence. The vanity of this excuse becomes the more obvious because we possess a series of notes, letters and memoranda from these important witnesses. Their decease, and the fact that they were known to be constantly opposed to the deportations (it is alleged « from political motives »), ought to have prompted the Commission to search for posthumous evidence in their private and official archives. The Belgian Government possesses several documents of this kind. The Members of the Minority of the Sub-Commission succeeded in finding a few more. Dr. Krieg's share in these discoveries remains obscure.

Another source of information which it was essential to consult was evidently the archives of General Headquarters and of the Ministry of War which could not have remained silent on an event of such importance. The members of the Minority consulted them. It was the duty of the Sub-Commission's expert to forestall them and to spare them the trouble of instructing their colleagues in this matter.

Must we attribute the errors of fact committed by Dr. Krieg to these omissions and to this inaction? Whatever their cause these errors are bla-

(1) The appendices to Dr. Krieg's report contain only the following German documents :  
1. First Ordinance of the Governor General of Belgium against voluntary unemployment (August 15th, 1915);  
2. Second Ordinance of the Governor General of Belgium against voluntary unemployment (May 15th, 1916);  
3. Instructions from the Governor General of Belgium to the Civil and Military Services under his command with regard to the execution of the deportation to Germany of the voluntarily unemployed Belgians (October 28th, 1916);  
4. Instructions from the Governor General of Belgium to the Governors and to the Commandant of Beverloo with regard to the drafting of lists of unemployed, with a supplement; telegram (October 12th, 1916);  
5. Principles laid down by the Ministry of War with regard to the use to be made of the voluntarily unemployed Belgians in works in Germany (November 15th, 1916).

tant and it is unpleasant to note that they all favour his thesis; they help him in his tendency to obfuscate or to obscure the primary part played in the decision to decree the deportations by the Higher Military Command and by the leaders of German industry.

The following are the principal German confidential documents which we have in mind (to mention only a few of those which have been published on the Belgian side) in addition to the account of the debates of the Economic Conference of June 19th, 1915, and to Governor General von Bissing's apology, addressed on November 25th, 1916, to Field Marshal von Hindenburg (quoted above):

A confidential circular from Governor General von Bissing of May 15th, 1916, to the Military Governors, to the Commanders of Beverloo and Maubouge and to the *Kreischefs*, including secret instructions for the application of the Governor General's decree of the same date (cf. hereafter *Document D*);

A confidential circular from the same of August 4th, 1916, to the Authorities insisting, in accordance with the decree of May 15th, 1916, on the transportation of the unemployed to Germany where an urgent need of technical and industrial workers was felt (cf. hereafter *Document E*);

A long confidential note dated September 25th, 1916, drafted by Governor General von Bissing, or by his instructions, to serve as a memorandum of his ideas on the deportations and to be used in a Conference called by General Headquarters for Thursday, September 28th, 1916 (and which was in fact held on that date), in order to discuss the means of alleviating the lack of workers in Germany and of remedying it by using the labour of occupied territories (cf. hereafter *Document F*) (1);

A long confidential memorandum drawn up at the end of 1916 by the Doctor of Philosophy and Law, W. Asmis, for the Section *Handel und Gewerbe* of the Government General of Belgium, with a preface, dated « Brussels, January 10th, 1918 », by the Chief of the Section Dr. von Köhler, Director of the Ministry, and entitled « The Use of Belgian labour in the economic organization of Germany after the war ».

The dossier, practically complete, of the German Administrative Archives concerning the deportations in the district of Nivelles for the year 1916 (2).

These secret German documents, after appearing in various publications, were reproduced in the *Rapports et Documents d'enquête* of the Belgian Commission of Enquiry, vol. 2 (1923) and vol. 3, tome II (1921).

By leaving them aside in his report, as well as other German documents of the same kind, Dr. Krieger and the majority of the Sub-Commission found the means of attributing with some plausibility the responsibility for initiating the deportations to Governor General von Bissing and to Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg, while it really rests with the Higher Military Command.

In his secret memorandum of September 25th, 1916, on the projected wholesale deportations Governor General von Bissing expresses himself as follows :

« For some time already I have made it the object of my most ardent efforts to render possible and, according to circumstances, to facilitate the transfer of Belgian workers and especially of *qualified skilled workers* for the benefit of German industry. Two solutions were considered : either enlistment, or forcible deportation to Germany.

« A forcible transfer to Germany, whether of the body of unemployed or, as has been proposed to me, of those liable to military service, is an extremely delicate question and may lead to extremely harmful circumstances, as much from the economic as from the political point of view, and for Belgium as well as generally. On the other hand, as the enlistment of Belgian workmen met with a great deal of opposition and only to a very slight degree alleviated the lack of labour in Germany, I have endeavoured to remedy this by drafting, in May, 1916, an ordinance of which the second article is most important. »

There follows an analysis of this decree, which substituted for the ordinary prosecutions and penalties for refusing to accept German work, the power given to the Governors, Commanders and *Kreischefs* to order the forcible deportation of the unwilling worker to the place of work, even in Germany, with reservations concerning the respect of International Law as regards the nature of the work required, the urgent necessity for the requisition and the good organization of control in the places of work.

The Governor General recalls that he took care, on the same day, to send confidential comments on this decree, in a circular addressed to his subordinates responsible for its application, and that he instructed them to « *grève as official motive* » for the deportation the anxiety of the authorities to maintain order and tranquillity. He adds that, on August 4th, 1916, he sent fresh instructions to the same Governors, Commanders and *Kreischefs* telling them not to hesitate to use the power given to them by the decree of May 15th, 1916, « because there exists in Germany a great need for technical and industrial workers ».

He also recalls the encouragement which he gave at the same time to the attempts of enlistment made by the *Industrie-Büro*. He proceeds as follows : « If this enlistment of workers and the forcible deportation of workers to Germany, executed within the limits prescribed by me, do not in time yield sufficient results there remains the examination of the proposal of the Higher Military Command *to deport forcibly to Germany all those liable for military service (Herrschäftigen)*. I must in any case strongly object to such a measure, which is very difficult to carry out from the practical point of view, extremely harmful from the economic point of view, and politically undesirable (1).

« From a practical point of view the deportation of those liable to military service, who number many thousands, is only possible if one possesses the necessary means of compulsion, and if no account be taken of the part played by these men in the economic life of Belgium. It will be extremely difficult to make any exceptions or to divide men liable to military service into various classes.

(1) The typed copy of this document, at present in the *Archives de la guerre*, is corrected and annotated by the Governor General himself.

(2) This dossier belongs to the *Archives de la guerre*.

“ From the economical point of view such deportations must be harmful, not only to Belgium herself, but also to all enterprises useful to Germany and, in some cases, to her Armies, because there are a great number of men liable to military service among the miners and among those regularly employed in the workshops which we have reopened for military purposes. The same remark applies to agriculture and to the preservation of economic life which cannot be ignored if order and tranquillity in occupied territory is to be preserved, and if the welfare of this country is considered according to the rules of warfare on land (*Landkriegsordnung*). ”

“ From the political point of view such deportations must awaken in neutral, nor to mention foreign enemy, countries *the most unfavorable* feelings towards us. The suspicion will soon be expressed that Germany seeks to bolster up her decreasing strength by using Belgians liable to military service. Besides, such wholesale deportations, apart from all economic considerations, will finally provoke among the population a restlessness which, added to the effect of other measures, must in the end overstrain the bow and provoke explosions; without considering the possibility of smothering the latter, they must bring about situations for which *I neither can nor will accept the responsibility*. ”

“ The fact that these rigorous measures will put an immediate stop to the imports of food from overseas can only be considered as of secondary importance. It is far more important to consider the probability that, as a result of stirring up the whole of the population and especially the workmen, mass strikes will take place and that the work undertaken and the manufacture of products in Belgium by Belgian workmen in the military interests of Germany will no longer be carried on. The consequences of this situation will be extremely disagreeable from both the practical and the political points of view for the products of Belgian work help us to strengthen our political relations with neutral countries (1), and the production of coal, which ought especially to be increased just now, allows us to help our Allies. We must also take into account the fact that such wholesale deportations and the use made of the deportees in Germany for industrial or military purposes can be of no assistance, because these deportees will refuse to work at the place of work and I know of no means at the disposal of a cultured State to compel unwilling workmen to turn out really profitable work. These wholesale deportations will only bring to Germany thousands of additional mouths (*Fresser*) and the lack of labour will not be alleviated. If, on the other hand, we use the method of enlistment which I have determined, with the auxiliary means which I intend to employ and the forcible transfer of unwilling workers to places of work, I believe it will be more possible than before to render a sufficient quantity of Belgian labour available for Germany. ”

This must fully represent the Governor General's views on this question of projected deportations, for he concludes : « The above must suffice to elucidate this question so far as I am concerned. »

It would be vain to seek among these pages the slightest allusion to a conception of the social welfare of the unemployed, or to a real danger of their spontaneous rising, prior to the deportations. Quite on the contrary, in the second part of his memorandum dealing with the means of maintaining the revictualling of the occupied country in case of wholesale deportations, the Governor General points out the danger of such rising which

would be provoked if too rigorous measures of rationing were taken, following the probable suppression of American Relief, which would itself be the consequence of the deportations.

The necessity of safeguarding public order and tranquillity is merely the official reason to be given ». The real reason for the deportations is shewn clearly by the Governor General in the passage in which he notices that : « If the voluntary enlistment of the workmen and the limited deportations instituted by me do not in time yield the expected results, as regards the alleviation of the lack of labour in Germany, there remains the examination of the proposal of the Higher Military Command to organize the wholesale deportation of the male population of military age ». Dr. Asmis, on his side, expresses himself as follows (the italics are ours) :

“ The voluntary enlistment having lately failed to attain the expected results, the Ministry of War approached the Governor General for the first time, on March 2nd, 1916, with the demand that 400,000 Belgian workers should be procured for deportation to Germany, *in order in this way to liberate for the service of the Army an equivalent number of qualified workmen fit for military service, of whom several hundred thousands had not yet been called up*. The idea of using means of compulsion was, however, first abandoned owing to the very serious objections of the Governor General, and attempts were made to attain the same object by improving and developing voluntary enlistment.

“ *The new and extensive programme of armaments laid down by the Higher Military Command during the summer of 1916 rendered more and more urgent the need for labour. On September 14th, 1916, the First Quartermaster-General (1) demanded from the Governor General the immediate drafting of lists of Belgian workmen so that he might be able to dispose of them at any moment.*

After new and lengthy negotiations between the Higher Military Command, the Government General and the Ministry of War, it was decided on principle, under pressure of military needs, at the beginning of October, to proceed with the forcible transport of Belgian workmen to Germany (2).

## XI.

There remains no doubt concerning the authority directly responsible, the aim and true character of the deportations and the opinion of Governor General von Bissing. The measure decided upon in September and October, 1916, was a measure of military interest claimed for a long time and finally imposed on Governor General von Bissing by the Higher Military Command, in spite of his resistance, and we may add of that of the Imperial Chancellor, von Bethmann Hollweg. The social welfare of the unemployed and the safeguarding of public order, supposed to be jeopardized by unemployment, have not played in the conception and execution of this measure the part ascribed to them by the majority of the Sub-Commission and their expert. It is also inaccurate to say that, from the point of view of the initiative of its execution, the measure had originated in a judicial op-

(1) At that time General Ludendorff had just been appointed to this post on the Western Front.

(2) Dr. phil. u. jur. W. Asmis : *Nutzarmutshung belgischer Arbeitskräfte für die deutsche Volkswirtschaft nach dem Kriege*, pp. 91-92.

nion of the Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg of October 9th, 1916, solicited by Governor General von Bissing, or in instructions given by the latter, on October 28th, 1916, to his *Kreisches*. The consequence, if not the aim, of these errors on the part of the expert of the German Sub-Commission is to divert to the two deceased the responsibility for the measure.

The truth is that the immediate initiative came from General Headquarters, and was taken on September 14th, 1916, when the Governor General of occupied countries and various other interested personalities were summoned to a general Conference held on Thursday, September 28th, 1916.

As appears from his memorandum of September 28th, 1916, Governor General von Bissing made a supreme attempt at this Conference to prevent the adoption of the measure, which he considered a disaster for Germany, especially from the point of view of her policy in Occupied Belgium. His resistance was in vain; the Higher Military Command imposed its will and von Bissing had to give way. From that moment, as a disciplined soldier, he could only carry the measure into effect. His personal guilt rests in the fact that he became the conscious and servile apologist of the deportations in accordance with the arguments used in the official justification, of whose vanity he was better aware than anyone else. In order to reduce to the minimum the grave political complications which he feared, he thought wise to provide himself with an opinion of the Imperial Chancellor on the means of carrying the measure into effect while seeming as far as possible to respect the rules of International Law. Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg gave him this opinion, on October 9th, 1916, and, by so doing, made himself responsible for participating in the initiative taken by the Higher Military Command.

On October 12th, 1916, the Governor General ordered his Governors to compel the Belgian municipalities by military order to draft lists of all the male unemployed, and decided on the repression by military courts of all who proved refractory.

On October 17th, 1916, a Conference of representatives of the Departments interested, in the Empire and in Prussia, laid down the principles to be followed for the recruiting of the unemployed (1). Finally the Governor General drafted his own instructions for the execution of the measure in his circular of October 28th, 1916. At that time deportation had, by his order, already begun in the district of Mons (October 26th, 1916). The Higher Military Command strongly urged him to take action; this is shewn by his letter of November 25th, 1916, to Field Marshal von Hindenburg, in which he recalls that he had first been asked to deport 20,000 workmen per week, this order being later countermanded (November 2nd, 3rd and 11th) the figure being reduced to 8,000 men per week. Regarding these counter-orders, von Bissing once more confirms in this letter the true reason for adopting the measure, while expressing his « regret for this new delay in the effort pursued by Your Excellency (von Hindenburg) as by myself to alleviate the lack of labour prevailing in Germany ».

These are the exact facts and responsibilities concerning the wholesale deportation of the inhabitants of the territory subjects to the Government General.

(1) During this meeting the Minister of Foreign Affairs expressed the opinion that the greatest moderation ought to be shewn; this opinion reflected once more the apprehensions of Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg and of his advisers.

## XII.

In order to obtain a complete idea of the Imperial Government's responsibility we must examine another phase of the deportations : the way in which they were executed in the war zone (*Etagengebiet*). This district was not subjected to the Governor General's authority and was placed directly under the control of the military authorities. In this region the deportations were ordered by a decree from General Headquarters, dated October 3rd, 1916 (Cf. hereafter *Document A*). This decree, emanating directly from the military authorities, is therefore, according to chronological order, the first measure of execution of the resolution adopted in conference on September 28th. Dr. Krieger merely mentions it incidentally in his report in quoting a Belgian document referring to it (1). He does not examine it and fails to show its direct relation to the resolution of September 28th, 1916, and to the Governor General's decree of October 28th, 1916. Thanks to this omission he helps, or allows, the reader to believe that the deportation decided in principle on September 28th, 1916, remained limited to the Governor General's territories and to the period extending from October 1916 to February 1917, while, in fact, it included the War Zone and proceeded in the latter until the end of the War, in spite of the Imperial decree of March 2nd, 1917, which stopped the transportation of men from the Governor General's territory.

The German Commission had evidently the right to narrow as it thought fit the field of its investigation, but this ought to have been mentioned in its conclusions and in Dr. Krieger's report, in order to avoid any misrepresentation. It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that, in the present case, the Commission and its expert have managed to allow the uninstructed reader to overlook a whole phase of the deportations, and that this phase was precisely by far the most important owing to the number of the victims, the cruelty of the treatment inflicted upon them, the gravity of its consequences and the duration of its application : two full years (from October 3rd, 1916 until the end of hostilities). By way of omission they thus succeed in eliminating from the public debate on the deportations twenty-four

(1) Insisting on once on scrupulous exactitude, Dr. Krieger here rectifies a slight error in the « Liste des personnes désignées par la Belgique pour être livrées en vertu des articles 228-230 du Traité de Versailles » and writes as follows: « Among the accused are the expert Imperial Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg to whom is attributed the « général responsabilité for the deportations on account of the order of the 3d — it ought manifestly to be the 28th — October, 1916 », and Field Marshal von Hindenburg who is mentioned as « responsible for the general order for the deportations », while the ordinance of October 3rd, 1916 refers only to the Belgian War Zone ».

The mistake made by the Belgian Government in attributing the general responsibility for the ordinance of October 3rd, 1916 to Chancellor von Bethmann-Hollweg is explained by the fact that this Government was convinced, at the time when the « Liste des Altérimants incriminés de violations au droit des gens » was drafted, that the general responsibility for the deportations rested, on the one side, with the Higher Military Command and, on the other, with the Imperial Chancellor, on account of the judicial opinion which he had given. They did not know, at the time, the date of the Conference summoned by General Headquarters (September 28th, 1916), when the deportations had been decided upon in principle, neither did they know the text of General von Bissing's decree of execution (October 28th, 1916). Not understanding exactly the method of procedure adopted for the carrying out of the deportations they thought that the military decree of October 3rd, 1916, which affected only the War Zone, was also a general order applying to all occupied territories the decisions taken in principle by the Higher Military Command. This error of detail affects neither the question of responsibility for the initiative of the measure nor that of the general responsibility for its execution.

months of continued abuse, a colossal amount of suffering and a crowd of over 60,000 deportees (cf. statistics hereafter, *Document C*). It is impossible not to believe that such an enormous gap, including more than half the facts of the case, and those the most reprehensible (1) was only allowed to occur in this report by its author, and by the majority of the Sub-Commission who followed and approved him, owing to their intention to free from all responsibility the supreme military authority of the Empire.

## APPENDIX

### A.

#### NOTE ON THE DEPORTATIONS AND FORCED LABOUR INFILCTED BY THE GERMAN AUTHORITIES ON THE BELGIAN CIVIL POPULATION, IN THE WAR ZONE AFTER THE IMPERIAL DECREE OF REPATRIATION (February 1917-November 1918).

After the German Emperor's decision to put a stop to deportations had been communicated to Governor General von Bissing (March 2d, 1917), the enforced transportation of Belgian workmen to Germany came to an end only in the territory administered by the General Government. It was pursued without interruption in the Etapengebiete until the end of the War. It is necessary to recall briefly these facts on which German public opinion possesses still less information than on those which took place in the Governor General's territory.

Even previous to October 1916, the services of the population of several communes situated in the Etapengebiete had been requisitioned for work carried on sometimes in distant districts which did not interest only the occupying army and had the definite character of military operations. Following the General Headquarters' decree of October 3d, 1916, these requisitions and mass deportations were methodically organised.

In conformity with the false justification which had been officially adopted on September 28th, 1916, together with the decision of principle, the military authorities invoked their obligation to fight the unemployment prevailing in the districts subjected to their jurisdiction. The false character of this justification has already been insisted upon above and it is unnecessary to refute once more this argument which serves as a pretext to an evident violation of the rules of International Law and of humane principles.

The fact is that the Higher German Military Command was in need of a great number of navvies and workmen of other trades to carry out a vast scheme of military works at the Front. If Belgian workmen, not already employed on work deemed urgent by local military authorities, did not enrol in sufficient numbers, the Higher Military Command reserved to itself, through this decree, the right to exert pressure on municipal authorities and to use force in order to ensure a sufficient amount of labour (1).

According to the Belgian Commission of Inquiry, the organisation of

(1) See hereafter *Documents A* and *B*. It should be noted that the War Zone included only a small part of the Belgian territory : the two provinces of Western and of Eastern Flanders ; in the province Hainaut, the district Tournai and a part of the district Mons-Ath ; in the province Luxembourg, a part of the district Arlon, say altogether almost one fourth of the Kingdom. Nevertheless more men were carried away from this region than in the territory of the General Government.

(1) The army of the Kronprinz Rupprecht of Bavaria alone claimed urgently 20,000 workers on October 1st, 1916.

deportations in the Etapengebiet occupied by the Fourth Army is described as follows :

“ A special organisation, the *Arbeitsamt* (Labour Office) was established in the principal recruiting centres. A German who was generally familiar with the customs of the region was placed at its head. In one way or another, through intimidation, violence or devious means, the *Arbeitsamt* obtained the official list of the people registered in the various communes. Armed with these documents, this office summoned, either directly or through the burgomasters, a certain number of workmen generally without success. General battues were then made by the gendarmes and the relations of the refractory workers were detained in prison until they answered their summons.

“ In other cases of infringement, heavy fines were inflicted on the municipalities and the local authorities were made responsible and imprisoned. At Tournai, in order to make an example and facilitate recruiting, thirty-one men were deported to Germany together with one alderman, M. Wibaut. “ In other cases, after vainly applying for workmen to the municipality, the *Arbeitsamt* organised wholesale arrests during a « control » meeting of the male population (1). The inhabitants went without suspicion to these « controls » to which they were accustomed and which appeared to them merely the outcome of police regulations. The victims were immediately conducted to a building guarded by soldiers and entrained a few hours later to some place on the Front, often very far away from their homes.

“ Another procedure employed by the directors of the *Arbeitsamt* may be compared to the « razzias » carried out by Arab slave dealers in some negro village of Central Africa. Late at night, without warning, when everything was quiet, and when the tired workmen had returned home, a body of German soldiers surrounded a village while armed patrols broke into the houses of the sleeping villagers and violently carried away either a father, a son or a brother amidst the tears and lamentations of women and children. “ Such requisitions and deportations not only concerned the unemployed, but men employed on productive work; in many cases, farmers' sons were detained for over a year to work as navvies in France when it had been promised to their indignant fathers to send them back at harvest time. It cannot be argued that these men had been dependent on public charity.

“ After their arrival at the place of deportation, the deportees were drafted in « battalions of civil workers » (*Zivil Arbeiter-Bataillone* or Z.A.B.) commanded by soldiers generally chosen for their harshness or even their brutality. These commanders and the soldiers placed under their orders inflicted upon the workmen the most cruel treatment.

“ The deportees thus enlisted in military units were subjected to a pitiless and brutal discipline which was all the more odious in that it aimed at increasing the amount of labour of men bent upon a task directed against the interests of their country and further obliged to erect military works against their own kith and kin.

“ This was, in fact, the character of the work which was imposed for so-called humanitarian reasons upon the requisitioned workmen. These tasks, though varied, were directly or indirectly connected with the defence works of the German army. The following list drafted from the evidence

of deportees is sufficient proof of this : loading and unloading of munitions, gravel and cement ; cutting down trees (1) ; erecting concrete shelters and sheds ; raising earthworks for defensive purposes ; erecting barbed-wire entanglements, mending roads in the vicinity of the Front.

“ There is no possible doubt that Belgian civilians were requisitioned in order to take part in the rapid erection of the defensive system adopted during the summer of 1916 by German military Headquarters and which is known in the history of the war as the Hindenburg line (2). Even if this fact were not established by the evidence of the victims, inspection of the map would be sufficiently convincing. All the localities where the presence of battalions of Belgian civil workers has been recorded, are situated behind the Front from Verdun to the Belgian coast (3).

“ From October 1916 until the Armistice, the Belgian population subjected to military jurisdiction (including the *Etapengebiete*, the maritime zone and the front) lived constantly under a regime of military forced-labour and deportation. The inhabitants of these regions did not benefit from the order putting a stop to the deportations which was exacted from the German Emperor, at the beginning of 1917, by the protests of the Belgians backed by the indignation of the whole world. The General Headquarters and the army leaders on the strength of the autonomy of military command — which gave them the right to appreciate the measures necessitated by the War — maintained their right to claim enforced work from the inhabitants of the territory subjected to their jurisdiction.

“ It even happened that, in certain parts of Belgium which had been lately annexed to the *Etapengebiete*, owing to the fluctuation of the Front, or for other reasons which may be connected with the question of deportations (4), certain deportees liberated in 1917, following the Imperial decree, were seized and deported anew, in 1917 and 1918, by order of the Military authorities. They were thus time compelled to forced labour behind the German Front. »

\* \* \*

What were the conditions under which the deportees worked in the Z. A. B.? The Report of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry describes them as follows :

“ As already stated, the men only received in payment for this forced labour the ridiculous wage of thirty pfennigs per day. Lack of zeal entailed severe punishment accompanied by insults and blows. The men were guarded by armed sentries and several lost their lives by attempting to escape. The German staff carried out strictly the stern orders of the battalion and company commanders.

(1) The Germans used a great number of trees for their defence works which came mostly from the woods, roads and parks of Flanders.

(2) The same line behind which the German troops retired in the winter of 1917 in order to foil the expected French offensive.

(3) The report of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry includes in its appendices V and VI the two maps published by Mr. R. Henning, in his book « *Les Déportations de Civils Belges en Allemagne et dans le Nord de la France* ». Many localities of the districts of Lille and Verdun are marked on it where the deportees were quartered ; these localities close to the Front were generally within the range of Allied artillery.

(4) Example. The district of Mons which was included in the *Etapengebiet* in 1917.

“ The deportees were evidently housed and fed. The housing does not seem to have provoked many criticisms. The same remark does not apply to the food : all the men complained that the food was not nourishing and that the rations were insufficient, considering the physical effort required of them.

“ The German authorities do not seem to have paid attention to the health of the deportees except, of course, in case of possible contagion.

“ When a man declared himself ill, he was neither looked after nor exempted from work. Attention was only paid to him when he was completely exhausted. The numerous deaths in hospitals were due, to a great extent, according to the evidence of the men's companions, to ill treatment, lack of care and exhaustion.

“ The local Commission which endeavoured to assist the deportees of the district of Ghent had requested, on several occasions, notably in June 1917 when it asked for the repatriation of the deportees, that the German authorities should grant an increase of wage and reasonable indemnities to the victims of accidents and to the families of the deceased. It was, indeed, essential that the Germans should apply the law on accidents to the requisitioned workers and recognise their responsibility as employers. After many interviews and a lengthy exchange of correspondence, this responsibility was recognised in principle, but the rare indemnities allowed were insignificant and the half pay given to the workers amounted only to 1 fr. 10 per day. Later, the Germans refused any further discussion on the subject and even forbade the National Committee to grant special relief to the wounded. As for the families of the deceased, the Germans only consented to allow them a maximum indemnity of 400 francs.

“ All the deportees suffered seriously from their enlistment in the Z. A. B. The inquiry into their physical condition after their return being the subject of a special chapter (1), will not be considered here. We must, however, remark that the return home of the first men requisitioned made a deep impression on their compatriots who had not left the country. They were, according to general opinion, reduced to the state of « lamentable human rags ». A few months in the Z. A. B. had transformed healthy men into skeletons.

“ The administration of the *Etapengebiete* consistently denied that the condition of the deported workmen justified such criticism. The sight of the deportees returned from France, the tale of their misfortunes and their description of the lives they were compelled to lead in the Z. A. B. prompted their compatriots to protest to the German authorities, but the latter refused to admit that these protests were at all justified. The local Commission of Ghent presented, in December 1916, a lengthy report signed by twenty-one civil workers sent back from France and denouncing with precision the treatment inflicted in the Z. A. B. General von Unger, Inspector of the district, answered that he had made an inquiry and that, according to him, the facts put forward by the Commission were all inaccurate. He added, however, that measures had been taken where real excesses might have been committed!

“ In February 1917, the Kommandantur of Ghent invited the local Commission to send musical instruments to the camps in order to provide

amusement for the workers. The Commission replied that what was chiefly needed in the camps was food and clothing. The Germans did not insist any further.

“ When, in June 1917, the deportees belonging to the part of the country administered by the General Government were regularly sent back from Germany, the same local Commission of Ghent asked the Kommandantur of the town to liberate the workers of the *Etapengebiete* who had been sent to the North of France. The Inspector answered that the requisition of workers in the district had been ordered in the general interest so as to diminish the expenses of relief-work and to facilitate revictualling. It is needless to insist again on the insincerity of this argument. The Inspector added that the deportees were better looked after in the Z. A. B. than were our own soldiers in the Belgian Army! After this remark, evidently prompted by political reasons, the German authorities informed the Commission that no further discussion on this subject would be allowed.

“ To the haughty denial of the German authorities concerning the ill-treatment inflicted upon the men enlisted in the Z. A. B., we may oppose the numerous testimonies which the deportees themselves laid before Belgian magistrates appointed to receive them, immediately after the liberation of the territory. They are preserved in the archives of the Commission of Inquiry. It is impossible to publish all this evidence. Even if a certain amount of exaggeration, which occurs frequently in such cases, is taken into consideration, the number and concordance of this evidence show that the deportees were treated with extreme harshness in all the Z.A.B. No doubt, certain commanders were not as pitiless in their methods of terrorisation as others, but it must nevertheless be recognised that, considering the odious character of the work exacted from the men, the methods employed in every unit were opposed to all notions of human dignity. »

In order to obtain an accurate idea of the severity of the deportations from 1916 to 1918 in the *Etapengebiete*, we may refer the reader to the facts related in the *Rapports et Documents d'enquête* published by the Belgian Commission and in a few other works such as :

The pamphlet entitled *Réquisitionnés de la ville de Gand*, with photographs, published in Ghent, by the local Commission « d'aide et d'assistance »;

The work of M. R. Henning : *Les Déportations de civils belges en Allemagne et dans le Nord de la France* (Brussels, 1919).

The memorandum of the Doctors Vandervelde and Cantineau published in the *Bulletin de l'Académie royale de Belgique* (1919), etc.

As an example, we quote a few of these facts :

*Statistics of the Deportations for the Town of Ghent and its Suburbs.*

Total number of men requisitioned	11,782
Requisitioned once	9,049
» twice	2,373
» three times	319
» four times	40
» five times	1

Total number of deaths	11,782
333	

(1) See the extracts of this special chapter in Appendix B hereafter.

## Causes of deaths :

Pneumonia . . . . .	60
Heart disease . . . . .	47
Diarrhoea . . . . .	32
Accidents . . . . .	22
Enteritis. . . . .	18
Tuberculosis. . . . .	17
General Weakness. . . . .	14
Aerial Bombardments. . . . .	11
Nephritis.. . . . .	9
Shot . . . . .	5
Diverse causes . . . . .	98

333

“ It may be stated, that, with regard to death through illness, most of the victims died, if not owing to ill-treatment, at least owing to privations which caused the illness :

2,648 deportees were attended by the municipal doctors after their return.

1,129 deportees were attended in the hospitals.

“ *Arrondissement judiciaire* ” of Oudenarde. — The total number of deportees for this district amounted to 11,406 :

233 died from the consequences of illness.

59 died through accidents in carrying out their work or from war wounds.

215 were wounded.

1,032 were weakened in health as the result of their deportation.

“ Most of the deportees were first sent to the North of France. In 1918, they were mostly requisitioned to work on the Front in West Flanders ” (Inquiry of 1919).

The working population of the “ *arrondissement judiciaire* ” of Termonde was subjected to a drastic exploitation on which a very precise report, drafted by the “ Procureur du Roi ” in 1919, has thrown a sinister light.

The following extract which may serve as an example shows what happened in the *commune* of Hamme :

“ On twenty different occasions, the Germans made requisitions detailed as follows :

1st *requisition* : 16th October, 1916, including 470 men. These were sent to Rougeries, Marles, Saint-Gobert, Laon.

2nd *requisition* : 26th October 1916; 251 men deported to Lesdins, Château-Porcien, Amagne, Darby, Saint-Quentin, Neuville, Saint-Amant, Coucy, Mézières-sur-Oise; Moy, Corbehem, Rethel.

3rd *requisition* : 30th November 1916 : 177 men for Verdun, Billy, Longuyon.

4th *requisition* : 22nd December 1916 : 360 men sent to the neighbourhood of Saint-Quentin, Neuville, Saint-Amant, Pierpont, Avesnes, Le Cateau, Hamégicourt, Moy, Stancourt, Lens, Fonciers.

5th *requisition* : 22nd February 1917 : 5 men (bargemen) were forced to ply between Gand, Valenciennes, Charleville.

6th *requisition* : 3rd April 1917; 11 men sent to Billy-lez-Verdun.

7th *requisition* : 10th May 1917 : 12 men sent to the neighbourhood of Mont-Cornet-lez-Marles.

8th *requisition* : 24th June 1917 : 414 men, destination unknown.

9th *requisition* : 10 October 1917, 200 men, destination unknown.

10th *requisition* : 17th October 1917, 35 men, destination unknown.

11th *requisition* : 14th December 1917, 337 men, destination unknown.

12th *requisition* : 25th February 1918, 320 men, Belgian front.

13th *requisition* : 14th May 1918, 173 men, destination unknown.

14th *requisition* : 21st May 1918, 11 men, destination unknown.

15th *requisition* : 4th June 1918, 171 men sent to Roulers and Moorslede.

16th *requisition* : 7th June 1918, 39 men, destination unknown.

17th *requisition* : 18th June 1918, 93 men for Bousbecque.

18th *requisition* : 3rd July 1918, 277 men, destination unknown.

19th *requisition* : 27th July 1918, 18 men, destination unknown.

20th *requisition* : 20th September 1918, 167 men, destination unknown.

“ These requisitions concern a little over a thousand men a great number of whom were recalled several times. They were all enlisted by force. The 177 men belonging to the 3rd requisition (November 30th, 1916) were arrested by German soldiers in their homes.

“ They were all employed on work close to the Front : building of roads, railways, demolishing of houses, digging ditches, etc. Out of a total of a 1,000 deportees, 100, that is to say 10 per cent, died of the consequence of deprivation and ill-treatment. Casualties were particularly heavy among the deportees of the 1st requisition : 15 per cent came back seriously ill; 5 per cent were partially or totally incapacitated.

“ At Weert (same district) 919 men were deported. The 1st requisition took place on October 16th, 1916; it included about 300 men. They were sent to Saint-Gobert and Laon.

“ The 2nd deportation took place on October 25th, 1916 and included about 100 men. They were sent to Saint-Quentin, Neuville, Saint-Amant, etc.

“ The 3rd deportation, on December 1st, 1916, included about 150 men. They were sent towards the French Front : Villers, Romagne, Mézières, Billy, Verdun, Danvillers, etc.

“ The 4th deportation, on December 23rd, 1916, affected about 200 men who followed in the same direction : Saint-Quentin, Verdun, Mézières, Uvillers, Bertincourt, Arras, Douai, etc.

“ Other minor requisitions occurred at irregular dates. It was only in the year 1917 that the Germans sent the deportees to the Belgian Front.

“ All these men, with a few exceptions, were employed on military works: building of roads, railways and earthworks, cutting down trees, digging trenches and shelters, transporting munitions, erecting barbed wire entanglements. The labour of these men was of considerable importance in the building of the famous Hindenburg line.

“ More than once, the deportees were obliged to run away from shellfire; several of them were wounded. They were unanimous in their complaints of lack of food and ill-treatment. Seventy-two died in exile; eleven were beaten to death, the others died of exhaustion. About 250 were sent back home too ill to continue their work. A hundred more were obliged to undergo medical treatment after their return. About 130 were attended in German hospitals on account of illnesses caused by exhaustion and ill-treatment. Approximately 35 suffered from the consequences of ill-treatment.

and blows inflicted upon them by their guardians. Several lost their sight and hearing either partially or totally. Half a score were wounded 'by bayonet thrusts; others returned maimed owing to accidents.

« The following figures show the state of exhaustion of the deportees on their return :

Claus, Florent, weighed 77 kgms. on departure and 48 on his return.
Latoir, Maurice » 114 » 68 »
De Croeve, Jules » 78 » 45 »
De Nys, André » 60 » 42 »
De Witte, Elias » 71 » 35 »
Van Houtte, Ath. » 74 » 38 »
Dauwe, Jos. » 68 » 39 »

« Approximately fifteen men were subjected twice to requisition that is to say, that they were recalled after having been sent home.

« Approximately 250 escapes took place, but nearly all the men were recaptured and severely punished.» (Inquiry of 1919.)

The circumstances were nearly the same in the Etapen-Kommandanturen of the *provinces of Hainaut* and of *Luxemburg*, as shown in the following examples :

In *Tournai*, Major-General Hopffer, Chief of the Tournai Kommandantur since October 1916, proceeded to call up first the unemployed, then the other workmen. He organised requisitions and arrests in the homes of the workmen and ordered the men to assemble either in the open air or in prison.

« The events which took place in Tournai at the time of the deportations are particularly suggestive. They show, on one side, the strong resistance of the Belgian municipal authorities and of the civil population and, on the other, the pitiless harshness of the Germans bent, at any cost, on executing the orders they had received.

« On September 29th, 1916, the German military authorities ordered the Town to place at their disposal 50 workmen, bricklayers, carpenters and navvies, in order to carry out certain work in the railway station for a wage of 3 francs per day.

« Alderman Wibaut replied that this order was contrary to Article 52 of the Hague Convention.

« On October 2nd, 1916, General Hopffer wrote to the Burgomaster :

« You have refused to place men at our disposal for the purpose of carrying out work of a military character. I draw your attention to the fact that my orders must be carried out without discussion.

« He further threatened the town with various penalties if it persisted in its attitude.

« Hopffer did not even consent to discuss the point of view of the municipal authorities; he further admitted that the work had « a military character », but he insisted nevertheless on enforcing it.

« The municipal Administration decided to publish a poster in which it announced that the Germans demanded workmen and that the Administration was summoned to provide them under the threat of severe penalties. No one came forward.

« Hopffer then chose the workmen himself, on October 6th, declaring at the same time that any workmen failing to answer the summons would be arrested and deported to Germany unless another one replaced him voluntarily.

tarily; he added that some representative of the town, including communal councillors, would be compelled to accompany every convoy sent to Germany.

« In order to create unemployment, Hopffer forbade the authorities to proceed with works of public utility and commanded that the list of the men employed in these works should be sent to him before the 9th of October.

« None of the men summoned having come forward, the gendarmes arrested them in their homes. They were shut up in prison and on October 11th, about 51 of them were sent to the station, on their way to Germany.

« Alderman Wibaut, whom the Germans considered as the soul of the resistance, was deported with them.

« On the same day, Hopffer issued a notice in which he announced the deportation and added that in case of a second offence « other transports and other measures would be ordered ».

« No doubt, in order to estimate the effect of these threats, he immediately sent (October 11th) a new requisition to the town :

« On October 30th, 25 labourers and 25 bricklayers had to report at Pont-à-Chin where a vast aviation camp was being erected. The Town was instructed to transmit this order to workmen and bricklayers registered on the electoral roll, beginning with the letter D and taking the following letters successively until the first 25 labourers and bricklayers had been found, as well as 25 other men who would be held as reserves.

« The communal Administration advised these men, but nobody came forward. During the night of the 13th of October, the German police went to the men's homes, but most of them were hidden. They managed, nevertheless, to capture 42 men who were imprisoned and conveyed, on October 16th, in a motor lorry to the place of work with 4 other workmen whose retreat had been detected.

« On October 15th, 75 more men had been singled out to go to Pont-à-Chin. This order was not more successful than the former and was followed by the arrest of 53 workmen who were sent there the following day.

« On October 16th, 40 carpenters and blacksmiths were informed that they had to report at Pont-à-Chin in a couple of days' time. In spite of threats they were as obdurate as the others and the same nightly arrests and deportations took place.

« From October 18th, the Germans organised regular battues arresting in the streets those whom they presumed to be workmen. 188 people were arrested in this way on October 18th. This went on for several days. The victims were conveyed to prison during the day time, sent to their work in motor lorries the next morning, while other workmen took their place in prison to be subjected to the same fate.

« Hopffer, nevertheless, insisted on the municipal authorities carrying out his orders. He asked that, on November 2nd, at the latest, the list of all the men under 50 years of age should be sent to him. At a meeting held on October 20th, the Communal Council refused « to provide weapons against their own children ». The German reply was not long in coming :

On October 2nd, Hopffer issued a notice forbidding the people to leave their houses for seven days from 6 p. m. to 7 a. m.; all shops, cafés and cinémas had to close at 6 p. m.

“ On October 23rd, the Town received the following letter which reveals a characteristic attitude :

“ To the Town of Tournai :

“ The refusal of the Town, through a decision of the Communal Council, to obey the orders of the Military Authorities of the occupied country, reveals an unexampled presumptuousness and a complete mis-conception of the situation created by the state of war.

“ The precise and clear situation is the following : The Military Authorities issue orders and the Town obeys. Otherwise it will have to bear the heaviest consequences as already stated in my previous well-intentioned explanations.

“ The commander-in-chief of the Army has inflicted upon the Town a fine of 200,000 marks for its refusal to present the requested lists; this sum must be paid within six days.

“ He further stated that until the required lists are sent to me, the Town will have to pay a sum of 20,000 marks for every extra day till December 31st, 1916, in the first place.”

“ These threats being of no avail, Höppfer ordered the arrest of three communal councillors : MM. Allard, Landreiu and Vakke. They were imprisoned on October 26th and sent to Germany on October 28th.

“ Finally, the Germans gave up the idea of obtaining these lists; the battles were resumed and, for many days, convoys of workmen could be seen being led to their work.

“ The deportees of Tournai were mainly sent to France in the districts of Prémontre, Jolimetz, Anglefontaine, Sedan and Sainte-Precuve.”

The same procedure took place in the “ arrondissement ” of Mons.

“ Until January 1st, 1917, the “ arrondissement ” of Mons was part of the territory administered by the Governor-General. The wholesale deportations were, therefore, mainly carried out under the regime prevailing in this territory. There was a Kreischef in Mons (Colonel von Quast), another in Soignies, another in Ath. These Kreischefs issued orders concerning the deportations which took place in 1916.

“ From January 1st, 1917, the western Part of the (“ arrondissements administratifs ” of Ath and Mons) became part of the *Etapengebiete* administered by the General Inspector residing in Tournai.

“ In June 1917, panic prevailed in Mons ; a fresh wholesale deportation was feared ; a number of men were shut up in the cavalry barracks but were liberated soon afterwards by an order, the origin of which remained obscure.

“ As a general rule, the *Arbeitsamt* ordered a certain number of inhabitants, sometimes more, sometimes less, to report at its office with their kit ; these were sent to their place of work.

“ This regime lasted until the end of the occupation. A great number of workmen, who had already been sent to Germany at the time of the first requisition in 1916, were thus again deported, mostly to the North of France.”

The southern part of the province of Luxembourg, including Arlon, belonged to the *Etapengebiete*, and the deportations were particularly severe in that region.

The so-called unemployed were generally sent to Germany during the autumn of 1916 and at the beginning of 1917 :

“ At a later date, many civilians, among whom were people who had already been sent back from Germany, were requisitioned, sometimes on several occasions.

“ It must be remarked that, in a great part of this agricultural region, unemployment practically did not exist and that cultivation suffered from the lack of labour due to the deportations.

“ Let us quote two examples among many others. The Burgomaster of Tontelange declared :

“ There was not a single unemployed in Tontelange. On the contrary a lack of labour was felt in this fertile district and the Germans did great harm to cultivation by increasing this need.”

“ The Burgo master of Guirsch made a similar declaration :

“ The deportees of the commune of Guirsch were not unemployed. How could we have had unemployed amidst an agricultural population usually short of labour ? The result of this odious measure was to cause great damage to cultivation. Many fields remained fallow, others were only partly cultivated.”

“ We have seen that the Germans took certain measures to “ create ” unemployment by prohibiting works of public interest which had been undertaken in order to forestall the danger of unemployment.

“ At Ettalle, 20 people were deported on December 2nd, 1916 ; among them were 9 farmers, 1 agricultural labourer, 1 shop-keeper, 1 plumber and 1 post-office servant.

“ During 1917 and 1918, 66 civilians were sent to France ; among them being 30 farmers, 3 students, 2 shop-keepers, 2 cobblers, 1 tailor and 1 butcher.

“ Five deportees who were sent to work in Belgium, in Florenville, Rossignol, etc. for varied periods, were all employed : 2 farmers, 1 butcher, 1 engineer, 1 manual labourer.

“ In Villers-sur-Semois, 25 men were sent to Germany on December 2nd, 1916, 24 of them were farmers, the 25th being a postman. At a later date, 52 men were sent to work on farms, among whom were 40 farmers. With one or two exceptions, all the others were employed, among them, 2 bricklayers, 2 cobblers, 1 roadmender, 1 blacksmith, 1 railway servant, 1 industrial worker, 1 shopkeeper, 1 student and 1 under-stationmaster.

“ In Bellegontaine, besides the men deported to Germany and those employed in forced labour in France and in Belgium, the Germans requisitioned 24 girls for picking buds and young shoots from bushes in the woods ; these girls had to work under the supervision of soldiers (May 1918).

“ In Habay-la-Viers, 108 men were deported to Germany and France ; 26 civilians requisitioned for France had already been deported to Germany whence they had returned a short time before. Several of these men were even requisitioned on two occasions to work in France.”

(Information extracted from the Inquiry of 1919 and from “ Rapports et Documents d'enquête ”, II<sup>e</sup> volume, passim.)

OBSERVATIONS MADE ON THE STATE OF HEALTH OF THE  
DEPORTEES ON THEIR RETURN FROM GERMANY AND  
FROM THE GERMAN FRONT IN BELGIUM AND FRANCE.

The repatriation of the deportees began after the Imperial decree had been received in Brussels on March 2nd, 1917.

The conclusions of Dr. Krieger and of the Parliamentary subcommission of the Reichstag, according to which this repatriation took place regularly and actively in all parts of the Governor-General's territory, ought not, however, to be endorsed.

The Emperor's decree had only been issued in favour of the men who had been deported « by mistake » as unemployed.

The number of men repatriated for this reason seems to have reached, at the end of March 1917, about 12,000, out of a total of 60,000, according to a note of the German Legation in Berne published by the « Journal de Genève » on April 3rd, 1917, that is to say about 20 per cent of the men who had been requisitioned.

The trials to which the deportees and the Belgian population had been subjected did not end with these repatriations for 1<sup>o</sup> the greater number of the deportees were still detained in captivity for many months and subjected to forced labour and 2<sup>o</sup> almost the only deportees who were repatriated at a later date were those who, owing to exhaustion caused by ill-treatment, could no longer be utilised by the enemy.

On the other hand, the Imperial decree, as already mentioned, was generally only applied to the parts of the country belonging to the Governor-General's territory; the *Etapengesetz* did not benefit from it; the decree did not bind the German military authorities who remained free to order any requisitions and deportations of Belgians in the *Etapengesetz under the plea of military necessity*.

The proof of these restrictions may be found in two semi-official notes which appeared in the German Press of the time, at a few days' interval :

« May 5th, 1917. — Following certain information which was recently published in the Press, some misconceptions seem to have arisen concerning the return of the Belgian deportees to their homes. In order to dispel misgivings in interested quarters, it must be noted that, according to the Imperial command, only the Belgians who were wrongly deported as unemployed have any chance to be sent home. The only men allowed to go back are those who are formally recognised as having been sent to Germany although the conditions stipulated in the decree of the Governor-General in Belgium (May 15th, 1916), regarding the unwillingness of the workmen, did not apply to them. »

« It is not at all intended to send home all the Belgians who are in Germany; the men rightly brought to Germany as unemployed capable of work, remain in Germany as before. »

May 13th, 1917. — The Ministry of War has informed the managing committee of the social democratic party in reply to its last statement, that not only those persons who were unjustly deported to Germany as unemployed *will return to Belgium* (so far as they were not yet allowed to return), but that, within a measurable space of time, all those Belgian workmen compulsorily brought to Germany, will be sent back to Belgium who do not voluntarily declare themselves ready to accept work in Germany.

These latter also will be brought back to Belgium at the latest on June 15, so that after that date there will be no more Belgians constrained to work for Germany.

More than three months after the Imperial decree had been issued, two classes of deportees were subjected to violence : on the one side *in Germany*, the deportees of 1916 belonging to the Governor General's territory whose repatriation had been purposely delayed for the purpose of exacting from them so-called voluntary engagements; on the other, *in Belgium*, the civil population of the *Etapengesetz* where the Imperial decree was not applicable, where requisitions continued and where nothing was altered regarding the fate of the unhappy deportees in the military yards of the German Front.

Concerning the health conditions of the deportees of the Government General, repatriated in 1917, the Commission of Inquiry has received, among others, the deposition under oath of Dr Ledent, a doctor of Liège who was able to carry on medical observations in the Red Cross Ambulance which he had organised for the purpose, Liège being on the homeward journey of nearly all the deportees coming back from Germany.

Dr. Ledent was able to examine rapidly about 40,000 deportees in the First Aid Post of Kinkempois-lez-Liège (1917). He found among them 3,408 cases, that is to say 8.5 percent needing urgent care.

According to Dr. Ledent, this figure must be too low, many of the deportees hiding their real state of Health owing to their desire to reach their homes as quickly as possible (1).

The report of the Belgian Commission of Inquiry adds the following remarks :

« Many deportees only came back from Germany during 1918; a great number only after the Armistice. These men escaped the systematic control established in all the communes which would have permitted strict observations to be recorded on their state of health. The same remark applies to the workmen who had been enlisted in France and Belgium in the Z. A. B.

« Wherever observations were made and where an organisation could operate discreetly under the occupation and could draft the balance sheet of the deportations, the figures are both eloquent and suggestive.

» The « Procureur du Roi » of Antwerp succeeded in establishing, "for his district (arrondissement judiciaire of Antwerp) the following proportions :

- 3 to 4 per cent of the deportees died in exile;
- 5.2 per cent were maimed or remained invalids;
- 6.5 per cent had scars caused by ill-treatment;
- 4.4 per cent suffered from frost-bite;
- 35.8 per cent returned to Germany in a state of illness.

We have published elsewhere the statistics drafted for the Town of Ghent and its suburbs by the local Commission.

The illnesses most prevalent among the repatriated deportees were : « pneumonia, enteritis, diarrhoea, tuberculosis, nephritis, not to mention

(1) The Belgian general statistics show that 2.17 per cent of the deportees died in exile whilst, for the great majority of them, the duration of the deportation did not last more than nine months (Appendix C.).

At the time of the requisitions, the Germans did not, as a rule, make a serious medical examination. Sometimes even this formality was omitted, instructions received having to be carried out hurriedly. Very little account was taken of the Belgian medical certificates.

contagious diseases like typhoid fever and influenza. The deportees suffered besides from a more or less acute state of general debility. The cause of these illnesses was evidently lack of care and hygiene, insufficient nourishment, considering specially the heavy work they were engaged in.

« It will be possible in the near future to determine the consequences of the deportations on the health and working capacity of those who were subjected to them. This work must be undertaken by the hospital doctors who are constantly called upon to look after some of these men who remain in feeble health; statistics will then be drawn up which will certainly show an enormous increase of tuberculosis.

« Such scientific observations have already been made. In July 1917, the German authorities sent back to the Saint-Pierre Hospital, in Brussels, 200 Flemish workmen who had been deported to the North of France. The result of their examination by Doctors P. Vandeveldé and G. Cantineau have been summarized in a memorandum published in 1919 by the « Bulletin de l'Académie Royale de Belgique ». The detailed examination of these numerous cases allowed these doctors to give a valuable general opinion on the subject. The deportees came from different provinces.

« It may be asserted that the state of health of the men has not been taken into account; one of the deportees, at the time of the requisition, was just recovering from pneumonia, several suffered for years from inguinal rupture, others from hernia and one from aortitis; there was one case of chronic endocarditis; one of the deportees suffered from atrophy in his leg as a consequence of infantile poliomyelitis; two men died from tuberculosis in Saint-Pierre Hospital.

The declarations of these patients concerning their food rations has also a general value since this regime was approximately the same in all regions where Belgian civilians were subjected to forced labour.

The daily rations of the men were as follows :

- 300 to 400 grammes of bread;
- 2 bowls of coffee (Ersatz);
- 1 ration of soup;
- A little fat, some pâté de foie or jam.

« The doctors Vandeveldé and Cantineau obtained precise particulars concerning the quality of these rations from the deportees who had to prepare this food; according to them, five times per week the soup contained 75 grammes of meat per ration. Each deportee thus received 375 grammes per week, that is to say 54 grammes per day; furthermore, the meat contained 50 per cent of bone.

« To the meat was added :

- Either 100 grammes of rice.
- Or 100 grammes of pounded wheat;
- Or 100 grammes of pearl barley or porridge oats;
- Or 150 grammes of beans;
- Or 300 grammes of « rutabagas » (a variety of swede).

« To the soup were added dry leaves of beetroots or nettles.

« The authors of the memorandum point out that Professor Slosse drew

up the balance sheet of such a regime. In doing this, he based his conclusions on the best rations possible including the richest food.

Food	Grammes.	Grammes.	Grammes.	Grammes.
Meat . . . . .	25	5.14	0.45	—
Bone . . . . .	25	0.24	0.60	—
Beans . . . . .	125	30.57	2.22	94.10
Bread . . . . .	350	28.35	2.52	166.46
Lard . . . . .	40	0.44	37.60	—
Coffee . . . . .	7	0.23	0.35	0.87
Chicory . . . . .	4	0.14	—	2.07
Total . . . . .	65.11	43.74	263.50	

According to Professor Slosse, this diet provides a total energy of 1,703 calories.

The doctors add that, according to Quetelet, the average weight of a Belgian man is 65 kilogrammes. According to Atwater, the ration for intensive work must provide 55 calories per kilo. The approximate total energy must therefore be  $55 \times 65$ , or 3,575 calories. The result of these calculations is evident: the deportees were subjected to a daily loss of 3,575 minus 1,703 or 1,872 calories. As these calculations are based on the best rations possible, it may be stated that the quantity of food received by our compatriots was still more insufficient.

It must not be forgotten that most of the time it was only possible to buy tobacco in the canteens — when they existed — and that, when wine and preserves were procurable, their price was prohibitive considering the deportees' meagre resources.

« The two doctors' memorandum deals with the observation of the clinical symptoms common to all the deportees. We give below some particularly edifying extracts :

*General remark:* — The examination of a great number of deportees leads to the conclusion that these men who endured the same privations, who were subjected to the same tiring work and the same tortures, present similar symptoms of an extreme regularity. No doubt the intensity of these symptoms varies to a great extent; some cases are severe, others slight; the clinical record is nevertheless singularly uniform.

We shall attempt to describe these general symptoms; we shall study later the morbid complications which aggravated the cases of certain patients. We shall end by a rapid examination of the surgical lesions affecting a great number of our inmates.

*First Symptoms.* — These scarcely vary: A general sensation of weakness, abdominal pains, inappetency, diarrhoea often stained with blood, cephalalgia, giddiness, sometimes fits of shivering and nasal hemorrhage. There appears at the same time an oedema of the limbs which increases rapidly; urines become less abundant while the micturitions become more frequent, especially during the night.

This is the moment when the fate of the deportees has to be decided:

A few are immediately sent to field hospitals; there, owing to rest and more adequate food, the symptoms diminish and the oedema disappears. When a few days later these patients reach the wards of the Saint-Pierre

Hospital, no apparent, external trace remains of infiltration and digestive trouble.

Unhappily, most of our compatriots were compelled to pursue their work in spite of their state of health. In these cases, oedemas increased, dyspnoea develops together with oliguria; sometimes even extensive phlegmons complicate oedemas, the developments of which we shall study later.

Let us add that the patients do not generally complain much of the way in which they were looked after in the field hospitals. They lay on straw, the food, though inadequate, was better than that in the camps and, what was still more important for the deportees, they escaped for a time from the brutalities to which they had been subjected for months. The return journey to Brussels seems to have taken place under satisfactory conditions.

*Arrival at the Saint-Pierre Hospital* — On their arrival at the hospital, all the deportees were in a state of revolting uncleanness; a great number were covered with vermin. Their clothes were in rags. A few patients were obliged to borrow clothing from the German Military Administration which took care to claim restitution. Several deportees were wearing wooden shoes, the boots of others were completely worn out. Many patients suffered from callousness and from sores in the soles of their feet; a few were without soles or stockings.

The men were thin. Their complexion was generally pale and greyish in colour. Their bearing was wild and anxious. Many days of quiet rest and of sustaining food were needed to restore their confidence and before they dared recount their adventures.

*Loss of weight*. — All the deportees without exception had lost weight. The average loss amounted to 13 to 14 kilos. Several of our inmates whose oedema persisted, suffered from further dysidosis and continued to lose weight at the beginning of their stay at the Saint-Pierre Hospital. Others regained weight rapidly and regularly without, however, attaining their pre-deportation weight.

« It appears from the observations made that, as a general rule, an increase of weight occurred shortly after the deportee had reached the hospital; as soon as the patient had received sufficient nourishment he gained 1 kilogramme per day. The doctors Vandervelde and Cantineau dwell on the significance of this progress :

Such progress, even during the convalescence of infectious illness, is exceptional. The only deportees who do not benefit from an increase in weight are those suffering from tuberculosis.

The deportees show, further, a marked amyosthenia. A fortnight's rest and tonic foods bring about an important increase of muscular strength. Nevertheless, it is exceptional for the patients to recover their normal strength even after a rest of three weeks and good food.

The examination of blood pressure shows that it has diminished considerably, provoking fainting fits and heart failure; rest and a good diet increase the pressure rapidly.

On their arrival at the hospital, the temperature of the deportees was slightly inferior to normal. Two weeks at least were needed in order to raise their temperature to normal.

« The doctors also record their observations with regard to blood analysis and renal trouble; all the deportees without exception present manifest symptoms of renal insufficiency — a direct consequence of their bad diet and of the unfavourable hygienic conditions to which they were subjected at the time of their deportation ».

They sum up their observations as follows :

*Summary of Chapter Second*. — If we consider the clinical record of all the deportees, we discover easily common symptoms which may be characterised as follows :

- A. Loss of weight which with certain patients, is more than 25 per cent of the normal weight.
- B. A marked amyosthenia.
- C. A lowered temperature persisting for a long time in spite of a good diet.
- D. A weakness of the kidneys which sometimes brings about nephritis with albuminuria and hematuria.

These common symptoms are no doubt the consequence of the diet, bad hygiene, overwork and ill-treatment.

Insufficient food caused anaemia, loss of weight, loss of strength and low temperature; its bad quality caused gastric and intestinal trouble and renal weakness.

Lack or care aggravated the condition of the workmen by disturbing the functions of the emunctories.

Owing to bad sleeping accommodation, the deportees were subjected to cold and damp.

Finally, blows and ill-treatment largely contributed to weaken the patients and reduce their power of resistance.

It must be noticed that, since the beginning of the war, and specially during 1917, many cases of renal weakness occurred in occupied Belgium among the civil population. These cases may be compared to those of the deportees, but they are generally less serious. The doctors in the coalfields noticed such cases among the miners; one of our own doctors noticed similar cases in an asylum for paupers. In Saint-Pierre Hospital, we have had under our care a great number of unemployed from Brussels whose diet consisted of the soup and bread rations distributed by the borough canteens; several of them suffered from severe oedemas. All these patients recovered rapidly; a little rest and tonic food sufficed to ensure the re-absorption of the transudated liquid ».

This is a constant symptom but deportations caused, among some of our compatriots, various morbid affections which complicated their illness.

« The doctors Vandervelde and Cantineau limited their observations to three illnesses resulting directly from the deportations and which seem to have made the greatest number of victims : tuberculosis, pleuresy and acute rheumatic fever.

« The authors point out that the men were taken away without any medical control and that some men suffering from serious organic lesions were deported with the others.

Healthy men were quartered with tuberculars in crowded huts. Further, insufficient food, hard work, physical and moral tortures, lack of care and cleanliness contributed to propagate tuberculosis.

The Belgians, at first, did not receive any presents. Then came small parcels of restricted quantities and, for the first time during the last week, a great number reached them through the Spanish Legation.

Certain commandants did not allow any increase of rations. In order to break the resistance of the men and force them to accept work, rations were even diminished in certain camps during a short period, but this stopped rapidly. Other commandants soon allowed an increase in the quality of the morning soup, in the mid-day meal or both in the mid-day and the evening meal, by the addition of porridge oats, barley, etc.

Most of the time no more food could be procured as the authorities were limited to 66 pfennigs per day unless a surplus, coming from the camps of the prisoners of war, was available. The Belgians received, in several camps, the food which was not wanted by the non-Russian prisoners; a few commandants also granted increased rations to those who accepted work or to those whom the doctors singled out as particularly underfed.

Besides, in its instructions of January 30th, 1917, the Ministry of War granted an increased ration of bread (to the extent of the ration of German workmen employed on heavy work) to the deportees who were weak or underfed. This increase lasted at first four weeks.

Thanks to the above measures, the food has at present improved, so that the Commission which, according to its statutes, enjoyed full powers, was able to content itself with approving the measures taken by the commandants; thus happened in Altengrabow, Münster and Meschede; on the contrary, in Guben, Wittenberg, Cassel and Soltau, the Commission raised the rations by the addition, in the three first camps, of oats and meal and in Soltau, where physical conditions were worse and food consequently more insufficient, by granting the rations enjoyed by workmen engaged on heavy work.

7. *Mortality in the Camps.* — It must be considered heavy. Judging from record III, pneumonia and heart failure come first with impressive figures.

With the exception of Guben and Meschede where a great number of cases of croupous pneumonia occurred, the nature of pneumonia is generally atomic and catarrhal, with little temperature bringing about death often in a very short time, one or two days. Together with the cases of heart failure, they must be considered as the result of underfeeding caused by the bad conditions prevailing, in Belgium, for a long time, by the poor physique of a certain number of men (men unable to fight and a large number of adolescents), by the food in the selection camps which was naturally insufficient and partly inappropriate for weak people, by the want of clothing and the great cold.

This statement agrees with the rapid observations made, in 1917, by Dr. Ledent on the return of about 40,000 deportees from Germany.

They corroborate the complaints made by the Belgians. The attenuating conclusions of the German Administrative Commission do not take away from the truth of these well-founded complaints. These conclusions are as follows :

The various circumstances explained above were bound to exert a particularly harmful effect on a mixed crowd of men, a third of whom were sent back as incapable of work, and sufficiently account for the high mortality.

It was unavoidable that many men in an exhausted condition should have been found among the deportees on their return to Belgium, for these persons ought never to have been sent to Germany. It would have taken weeks and months to feed them up and this would have been rendered very difficult owing to the food restriction in Germany.

It is very much to be regretted that some men should have died on their way back; it must not be forgotten that their transport during the bad conditions of winter-time, must have been harmful, that the doctors are inclined to give way to the instances of the men asking to be sent back and that certain cases of heart failure cannot be foreseen.

These conclusions, which are inspired by a comprehensible desire to shelter the German Administration from the medical responsibility of the death and prolonged illness of men who ought to have been exempted owing to their state of health, can only increase in the last resort the general responsibility of those who ordered the fatal measure and of those who put it into execution in spite of the principles of international law and humanity.

C Extract from the second volume of the Rapports et documents d'enquête Commission sur les violations des règles du droit des gens,  
des lois et des coutumes de guerre (pp. 24-25).

STATISTICAL RECORD THE DEPORTEES

Number of deportees	Classification of deportees according to age at the time of the requisitions				Time of the requisition	CLASSIFICATION OF DEPORTEES ACCORDING TO THE LENGTH OF THEIR EXILE										Number of deportees who died during their deportation	
	From less than 18 years	From 18 to less than 30 years	From 30 to less than 60 years	From 60 years and over		Last quarter of 1916	Year 1917	From 1 month to less than 3 months	From 3 months to less than 6 months	From 6 months to less than 9 months	From 1 year to less than 18 months	From 18 months to less than 21 months	From 21 months to less than 2 years	From 2 years and over	Length of their time unknown		
So-called unemployed from the territory of the Governor-General deported into Germany . . . . .	58.500	3.464 6%	54.214 92%	808 .	9	5	54.522 33.5%	3.576 6.5%	4.90	7.972	18.480 7.734	7.144 2.132	527	283	440	413 613	1.216 2.5%
So called unemployed re- quisitioned and transport- ed to the Front-Zone in France and in Belgium, in the Z.A.B. Battalions, of civil workers. . . . .	62.155	5.470 8.8%	55.307 89.9%	1.116 1.9%	59	3	46.674 75%	10.756 17.3%	12.800 17.7%	7.754	11.886 7.161	5.056 4.441	3.549 5.185	7.595	4.941 712	1.298 2%	
Total . . . . .	120.655	8.934	109.721	1.924	68	8	101.196 14.732	4.320	15.723	30.366 25.895	12.200 6.273	4.176 5.468	5.468 8.035	8.035 5.354	1.325 2.614	2.614 2.17%	

N. B. — The above statistical record has been drawn up by the Ministry of Justice from a systematic inquiry made by the Municipal Authorities in all the communes of the kingdom.

Attempts were made to classify the deportees according to the camps to which they were sent. The great number of places of deportation, the frequent changes of district, the vagueness of the declarations of certain deportees, the doubtful spelling of geographical names, compelled the authorities to give up this work. It has only been possible to gather some approximate figures concerning the principal camps, and these figures are published merely as an indication of the relative importance of these camps.

*Special remarks concerning the statistical data published by the Third Reichstag Sub-Commission, (Völkerrecht im Weltkrieg 1914-1918, 1st. Volume.)*

The Commission's expert, Dr. Krieger, estimates the number of « Belgian workers » at 66,150. It will be noticed that his figure is larger than the one given by the Belgian statistics above, which quotes for this category of deportees — at least for those who came from the Governor-General's territory — the figure of 58,500. It is to be noticed that a certain number of men coming from the *Eupen-Malmedy* were also deported to Germany. These men might have been omitted in the Belgian statistics established first of all according to the place of deportation; if this is the case, the total of victims of deportation quoted by the Belgian statistics, would fall several thousand short of the true figure.

Dr. Krieger estimates the number of deportees who died during their deportation as « about 1,250, that is to say 1.82 % ». This figure is evidently incorrect; according to Dr. Krieger himself it is only approximate (round 1,250). His calculation of the percentage is also inaccurate : Dr. Krieger's error amounts to 9 deaths out of 1,000 deportees.

No German statistics of the deportations are annexed to the report (*Gutachten*) of Dr. Krieger or to the Sub-Commission's conclusions.

In the pages of these conclusions devoted to Dr. Krieger's preparatory report, we read (p. 374-382) that Dr. Levi, the spokesman of the minority, took the initiative to communicate *in extenso* to his colleagues (meeting of December 16th, 1925), a document from the archives of the Ministry of War of statistical interest : The minutes, dated « Berlin, March 31st, 1917 », of the meetings of a special commission instituted as the result of complaints regarding the bad state of health of repatriated Belgian deportees, the death of several of them during the journey and the great number of deaths which occurred in Germany. This commission was instructed to inquire into the way in which the deportees were treated in the selection centres, to register eventually the abuses and to make proposals to amend them. Its members were : Prof. Dr. Gärtner, Kriegssanitäts-Inspekteur (of the *Methusal-Abliehung*), Rittmeister Sonnabend (of the *Ernährungs-Abteilung*) and Hauptmann Scheifers (of the *Kriegsanit*); it inspected selection centres from the 21st to the 30th March, 1917, that is to say five months after the beginning of the deportations and at a time when the Imperial decree had already ordered repatriation and put a stop to further requisitions.

It seems rather late in the day to remedy « eventual abuses ». The

observations made by the Commission which we have mentioned above (p. 47-49) show that such abuses were only too evident.

The minutes of the Commission are followed by three statistical records (p. 381-382).

*First Record.* — *Individual conditions*, in two parts : A. Arrivals.

Repatriated. — Recalled and unfit for work — Compelled to work (in each of the selection centres : camps of Guben, Wittenberg, Altengrabow, Soltau, Münster, Meschede, Cassel). — B) Inmates of the camps — Deaths, either in the camp hospitals, or in hospitals of the places of work.

*Second Record.* — *Number of deaths per month* (per camp, and in each kind of hospital).

*Third Record.* — *Causes of death* (per camp).

These records give the following figures regarding the period in which the observations were made, end of March 1917.

*Arrivals in Germany* : 61,934 men.

*Sent back to Belgium* : 17,433 of whom 4,283 were recalled and 13,150 unfit for work.

*Compelled to work* : 32,992.

The Commission registers, in the *seven camps*, 11,365 men. It states that 816 *deaths* occurred : 696 in the hospitals of the selection camps and 120 in those of the places of work. These deaths are classified as follows : 1916, November, 8; December, 64. — 1917, January, 172; February, 314; March, 176; under special conditions, 52 (total 816).

*Illnesses considered as the cause of death* : Heart failure 127; pneumonia, 421; croup, 6; pleurisy, 8; brain fever, 9; apoplexy, 5; enteritis, 44; dysentery, 8; tuberculosis, 50; exposure, 4; other internal illnesses, 42; other external illnesses, 15; causes of death not mentioned by the hospitals, 77.

These figures are insufficient to account for the mortality among the deportees and even among those who were inmates of the camps; this fact is besides recognised by the German Commission of Inquiry, (p. 379).

EXTRACT FROM THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE

« RAPPORTS ET DOCUMENTS D'ENQUETE »

of the Commission of Inquiry on the violation of International Law and the rules and customs of warfare. (pp. 41-42.)

Confidential circular addressed by Governor-General von Bissing to the commandants of Beverloo and Maubeuge and to the Kreischefs (1).

General-Gouvernement  
in Belgien  
III T.I. Nr. 4840

Brüssel, den 15. Mai 1916.

VERTRAULICH

An die (Militär-) Gouverneure, die Kommandanten von Beverloo und Maubeuge und an die Kreischefs.

Ich habe heute die nachfolgende Verordnung gegen die Arbeitsscheine erlassen, welche zum Ersatz der von mir aufgehobenen Verordnung gegen die Arbeitsscheine vom 15. August 1915 bestimmt ist und durch welche das Einschreiten der Militärgerichte und Militärbehörden bei Missbrauch amtlicher oder privater Unterstützungen ermöglicht werden soll. Die in Art. 2 dieser Verordnung enthaltene Bestimmung, dass an Stelle der Strafverfolgung die zwangswise Abschiebung zur Arbeitsstelle treten kann, veranlasst mich zu näheren vertraulichen Erläuterungen:

Durch die erwähnte Bestimmung soll erreicht werden, dass Unterstützung gemessende, arbeitslose belgische Arbeiter, deren Beschäftigung in Deutschland oder in Belgien für deutsche Zwecke erwünscht ist, auch gegen ihren Willen in solcher Arbeit gezwungen werden können. Das deutsche Industriebüro in Brüssel mit seinen Zweigstellen wird voraussichtlich grossen Bedarf an Arbeitern haben und in der Lage sein, etwaige ihm zur Arbeit zugewiesene Arbeiter in den in militärischen Zwangsbetrieb genommenen Fabriken unter gehöriger Aufsicht zu beschäftigen, oder es wird Auskunft geben können, ob und wo in Deutschland die betreffenden Arbeiter benötigt werden.

Voraussetzung für die Anwendung der Bestimmung ist, dass für die Arbeit des betreffenden Mannes Bedarf vorhanden und dass die nötige Beurichtigung sicher gestellt ist. Die Abschiebung von Arbeitern, die über 40 Jahre alt, Familienväter oder Besitzer ländlicher Grundstücke sind, wird sich im Allgemeinen nicht empfehlen. Eine gewisse Freiheitsbeschränkung ist mit der zwangswise Arbeitsanhaltung naturgemäß verbunden, auch wird die Sorge für Unterkunft und Versorgung von dem Arbeitgeber zu übernehmen sein, der dem Arbeiter einen seiner Arbeit und dem Arbeitslohn freier Arbeiter entsprechenden Arbeitslohn zahlen muss.

Die Abschiebung zur Arbeitsstelle wird sich nur in solchen Fällen empfehlen, in denen keine berechtigten Einwände aus dem Völkerrecht gegen die verlangte Arbeit hergeleitet werden können. Die Befugnis zum Verhängung

(1) The text of this circular was mentioned during the debate of the Reichstag Sub-Commission (meeting of November 19th, 1925). See the Sub-Commission's report, p. 430.

der Massregel habe ich auf die Gouverneure, die Kommandanten von Maubeuge und Beverloo und auf die Kreischaefs beschränkt, um ihrer sachgemäßen Anwendung sicher zu sein.

Ich weise besonders daraufhin, das dieses Auschreiben als streng vertraulich zu behandeln ist und nicht in unberufene Hände kommen darf.

E

EXTRACT FROM THE SECOND VOLUME OF THE

« RAPPORTS ET DOCUMENTS D'ENQUETE »

of the Commission of Inquiry on the violation of International Law and the rules and customs of warfare. (pp. 43-44.)

Confidential circular addressed by Governor-General von Bissing to the commandants of Beverloo and Maubeuge and to the Kreischaefs (1).

General-Gouvernement

III Nr. 5688

VERTRAULICH

An die (Mil.-) Gouverneure, die Kommandanten von Maubeuge und Beverloo und an die Kreischaefs.

Nach Mitteilung des Kriegsministeriums sollen die auf Grund meiner Verordnung gegen die Arbeitsschau vom 15. Mai 1916 zur Arbeit nach Deutschland abzuschließenden Belgier in das Zivilgefängnissenlager in Holzminden aufgenommen und dort nach folgenden Richtlinien behandelt werden :

1. Die Ueberwiesenen sind nicht Gefangene, sondern freie Ausländer, die nur im Interesse der Landessicherheit in ihrer Freizeitigkeit beschränkt werden müssen.

2. Unterkunft, Verpflegung und Behandlung wäre daher allen billigen Anforderungen ebensogut wie für die deutschen Arbeiter einzurichten. Eine Verwöhnung müste natürlich vermieden werden, um nicht den Anreiz zur Arbeitsaufnahme abzuschwächen. In dem Lager wäre durch die Deutsche Arbeiterzentrale eine geschickte Propaganda anzubahnen.

3. Die Ueberführung der Belger in die Arbeitsstellen übernimmt die Deutsche Arbeiterzentrale, die einen Vertreter nach Holzminden senden wird, nach Aufführung des Verbandes niedersächsischer Arbeitsnachweise, der sich mit den anderen Verbänden, insbesondere dem Westfälischen und dem Rheinischen ständig in Verbindung halten wird (die Reichszentrale wird vom Kriegsministerium aus verständigt). Die Aufsicht übt das stellvertretende Generalkommando X. Armeekorps durch seine Fach-

offiziere aus.

4. Die Verträge mit den Arbeitgebern werden von der Deutschen Arbeiterzentrale aufgestellt, die auch das Einverständnis des für den Betrieb örtlich zuständigen stellvertretenden Generalkommandos bebringt. Die

Kommandantur des Lagers kontrolliert durch sachverständige Offiziere, ob der Vertragsinhalt angemessen ist, und verfügt alsdann die Überführung unter Benachrichtigung des für den Betrieb örtlich zuständigen stellvertretenden Generalkommandos. Dieses hat die erfolge Unterbringung in der Arbeitsstelle der Lagerkommandantur mitzuteilen, damit dort der Verbleib der Belger kontrolliert werden kann. Im übrigen wäre für die Zurückbehaltung der Belger der Erlass des Kriegsministeriums vom 20. 6. 15 — 2200/15. geh. A. 1 — massgebend. (Mitgeteilt am 28. 6. 15 unter IIIa 4080 geh.)

Die stellvertretenden Generalkommandos werden vom Kriegsministerium ersucht werden, über die in ihren Bezirken unterbrachten Leute eine besondere Aufsicht auszuüben, sowie die Arbeitsbedingungen durch die Fach-offiziere und Gewerbeinspektoren prüfen zu lassen, bei Streitigkeiten zu vermitteln und erforderlichenfalls einzuschreiten.

\* \* \*

Ich ersuche nunmehr die Gouverneure und Kreischaefs, in allen geeigneten Fällen von der Befugnis des Art. 2 (Abs. 3) der Verordnung Gebrauch zu machen, da in Deutschland ein dringendes Bedürfnis nach technischen und industriellen Arbeitern vorhanden ist, welches auf dem Wege der freiwilligen Anwerbung nicht gedeckt werden kann. Für die Abschiebung der Arbeiter und ihre Rückkehr sind, da es sich um Sicherheitsgefangene handelt, die Verfügungen des General-Gouvernements vom 25-3-15 (IIIb 1305/15) und 24. 7. 16 (IIb 1182) massgebend, wonach für beides die Genehmigung des General-Gouvernements erforderlich ist.

Die Abschiebung wird wegen Gefährdung militärischer Interessen zu verfügen sein, doch wird es sich empfehlen, den Gefangenengelager Holzminden ausserdem mitzuteilen, dass es sich um eine auf Grund der Verordnung über die Arbeitsschau angeordnete zwangsweise Abschiebung zur Arbeitsstelle handelt.

Von der Transpruchnahme des Deutschen Industriebüros in Brüssel und seinen Zweigstellen wird angesichts der in der Heimat getroffenen Regelung im allgemeinen abzusehen sein.

Der General-Gouverneur :

Frh. von Bissing.  
Generaloberst.

Militär-Gouvernement der Provinz Lüttich : den 13.8.1916 (IIIa n° 2069).

(1) Extract from these circulars were quoted during the debate of the Reichstag Sub-Commission (meeting of December 19th, 1925) by a member of the Majority, Dr. Hanne mann (p. 422).

EXTRACT OF THE « BULLETIN DE LA COMMISSION  
DES ARCHIVES DE LA GUERRE »

(Vol. I. fasc. 3, 1924, pp. 187-197).

Governor-General von Bissing's memorandum on the project of wholesale deportation (September 25th, 1916) (1).

Brussel, den 25. September 1916.

Der Chef des Generalstabes des Feldheeres hat hierher mitgeteilt, dass am Donnerstag zwei wichtige Sitzungen stattfinden sollen, welche darüber zu beraten haben :

1. *In welcher Weise die Arbeitskräfte der besetzten Gebiete die Arrestenot in Deutschland nähigen oder abhelfen sollen.*

2. *Wie sich die Ernährungsverhältnisse in den okupierten Gebieten gestalten bezüglich gestalten sollen.*

Zu 1. Schon seit langer Zeit ist es mein eifrigstes Bemühen gewesen, die Zuführung belgischer Arbeiter, womöglich *gelehrter Facharbeiter*, für die Zwecke der deutschen Industrie zu ermöglichen bzw. zu erleichtern. Zwei Möglichkeiten wurden ins Auge gefasst, entweder die *Anwerbung* oder die *zwangswise Überführung* nach Deutschland. Eine zwangswise Überführung nach Deutschland, mag man nun hauptsächlich die Masse der Arbeitslosen dabei im Auge haben, oder sogar das mir vorgeschlagene Verfahren, die Heerespflichtigen zwangswise nach Deutschland zu überführen, ist *äusserst bedenklich* und kann zu Verhältnissen führen, die sowohl auf dem wirtschaftlichen wie auf dem politischen Gebiete und zwar für Belgien wie für die Allgemeinheit äusserst schadendbringend sein können. Allerdings habe ich, da die Anwerbung belgischer Arbeiter auf manche Widerstände stieß und durchaus der Not in Deutschland nur geringe Hilfe gewährte, auch dadurch zu unterstützen versucht, dass ich eine Verordnung im Mai 1916 erlassen habe, in welcher der Artikel 2 von eingreifender Art ist. Dort wird folgendes ausgeführt :

« Wer die Uebernahme oder die Fortsetzung einer ihm angebotenen, seinem Leistungsvermögen entsprechenden Arbeit ohne hinreichenden Grund ablehnt, obwohl er aus öffentlichen oder privaten Mitteln unterstützt oder durch seine Ablehnung unterstützungsbürtig wird, wird mit Gefängnis von 14 Tagen bis zu einem Jahre bestraft. An Stelle der Strafverfolgung kann von den Gouverneuren und gleichberechtigten Befehlshabern, sowie von den Kreischefs, die zwangswise Abschiebung zur Arbeitsstelle angeordnet werden ».

Eine gewisse Einschränkung erfährt diese Verordnung dadurch dass als hinreichender Grund der Verweigerung der Arbeitsübernahme die völkerrechtlichen Bestimmungen entgegenstehen (2).

Um die die Abschiebung veranlassenden Behörden vor der Verletzung der

völkerrechtlichen Bestimmungen bezw. der Landeskriegsordnung zu bewahren, habe ich vertraulich an die Gouverneure verfügt, dass die Abschiebung zur Arbeitsstelle sich nur in solchen Fällen empfehlen wird, in denen keine berechtigten Einwände aus dem Völkerrecht gegen die verlangte Arbeit hergehoben werden können, und dass für die Abschiebung die Voraussetzung sei, dass für die Arbeit des betreffenden Mannes Bedarf vorhanden und dass auf der Arbeitsstelle die nötige Beaufsichtigung sicher gestellt ist. Auch soll die Abschiebung von Arbeitern, die über 40 Jahre alt, Familienvater oder Besitzer ländlicher Grundstücke sind, im Allgemeinen nicht stattfinden. Als offizieller Grund der Abschiebung soll angegeben werden, dass der Arbeitsunwillige bezw. die Masse der Arbeitsunwilligen in dem besetzten Gebiete die Erhaltung der Ordnung und Ruhe in Frage stellen.

In Deutschland sollen diese abgeschobenen Arbeitsunwilligen dem dafür bestimmten Kriegsgefangenenlager in *Holzminden* (1) zugeführt werden. Dort sollen sie als freiwillige Arbeiter angesehen und zur freiwilligen Arbeit angeworben werden. Das Nähere ist mit dem Kriegsministerium vereinbart und zwar soll die Überführung der abgeschobenen Belgier nach der Arbeitsstelle die Deutsche Arbeitszentrale übernehmen, die dort die Verträge u. s. w. tätigt und alles andere mit Lagerkommandanten vereinbart. Die listiche Führung der so verwendeten Arbeiter hat das Stellvertretende Generalkommando zu veranlassen, damit der Verbleib der Belgier kontrolliert werden kann, auch um beim Generalgouvernement die Kenntnis zu bekommen, wo sich die einzelnen abgeschobenen Belgier in Deutschland befinden.

Unter den 4. August 1916 ist ein weiteres Ersuchen an die Gouverneure und Kreischefs von mir erlassen worden, dass sie in allen geeigneten Fällen von der Befugnis meiner bereits angeführten Verordnung Gebrauch machen sollen, weil in Deutschland ein dringendes Bedürfnis nach technischen und industriellen Arbeiten vorhanden ist und es wird dabei hervorgehoben, dass für die Abschiebung der Arbeiter und ihre Rückkehr, da es sich um Sicherheitsgefangene handelt, die Verfügungen des Generalgouvernements vom 26-3-15 und 24-7-16 massgebend sein sollen, nach welchen sowohl für die Abschiebung wie für die Zurückführung die Genehmigung des Generalgouvernements erforderlich ist.

Hierbei sollen das Industriebüro und seine Zweigstellen nicht in Anspruch genommen werden. Dagegen habe ich dem Industriebüro zur Fortsetzung seiner doch immerhin nicht unerheblichen Erfolge in der Arbeiterbeschaffung für Deutschland alle Hülften, die ich gewähren kann, zugesagt, und dem Leiter des Industriebüros erst neulich bei einer Sitzung aufgegeben, die geltend zu machen den Wünsche bei mir zur Sprache zu bringen. Ich habe auch überlegt und den Herrn Verwaltungsschreiber um Erwagung gebeten, ob nicht besonders grosse Mittel zur Auszahlung von grösseren Unterstützungen (2) an die zurückgelassenen Angehörigen der nach Deutschland angeworbenen Arbeiter und auch für Prämien für Arbeitswilligkeit zur Verfügung gestellt werden können und sollen.

(1) In the margin: « Through a communication received later limited to 400 — limited prisoners' camp. »

(1) The initials are underlined in the German text bearing von Bissing's notes. The document is published in a slightly altered form in Dr. Karl Bittman's work « *Werken und Warten. Erinnerungen aus Industrie und Staatsdienst* », Mueller, Karlsruhe, 1924, vol. 3th, pp. 44 and following. Its text differs slightly from ours.

(2) This sentence is underlined in red in the original.

It is not quite clear from the German text to which part of the sentence these words refer. The words are underlined with an indefinite pencil, the others with a black pencil. The whole in von Bissing's hand.

(2) In the margin is a note in von Bissing's hand-writing: « *Mehrere Mittel* ... then a word difficult to read.

Wenn sowohl diese Arbeiteranwerbung und auch die unter den von mir gegebenen Grenzen ausgeführte zwangswise Überführung von Arbeitern nach Deutschland gute Erfolge zeitigt, so erübrigts es sich, dem Vorschlage der Obersten Heeresleitung überhaupt nahe zu treten, sämtliche *Heerespflichtigen nach Deutschland zwangsweise zu überführen*. Jedenfalls muss ich meine lebhaften Bedenken gegen eine solche, praktisch so schwer durchführbare, wirtschaftlich ungemein schädigende und politisch unerwünschte (1) Massregel aussprechen.

Praktisch ist die Abschiebung der nach vielen tausenden zählenden Heerespflichtigen nur durchführbar, wenn man die Mittel dazu besitzt und gar keine Rücksicht nimmt auf das, was die Heerespflichtigen für das Wirtschaftsleben in Belgien darstellen. Ausnahmen in dieser Beziehung zu machen, nach Kategorien die Heerespflichtigen zu trennen, wird ebenso schwer wie bodenlich sein.

Wirtschaftlich muss deshalb diese Abschiebung schädigen und zwar nicht nur für Belgien selbst, sondern für alle diejenigen Handlungen, welche für Deutschland bzw. die Heeresleitung nutzbringend sein sollen, weil unter den Bergarbeitern *unter denjenigen, die in den von uns für die Heereszwecke wieder eröffneten Fabriken fleißig arbeiten, sich eine grosse Anzahl von Heerespflichtigen befinden*. Dasselbe gilt für die Landwirtschaft und dasselbe gilt für die Fortführung eines Wirtschaftslebens, das ganz unentbehrlich ist, wenn man ein okkupiertes Land in Ordnung und Ruhe erhalten und gemäss der Landeskriegsordnung für seine Wohlfahrt sorgen will.

Politisch aber muss eine solche Abschiebung im neutralen Auslande, ganz abgesehen vom feindlichen Auslande, die für uns *nachteiligsten Gewölle erwecken* und es wird nicht ausbleiben, dass der Verdacht wieder ausgesprochen wird, dass Deutschland seine ablehnenden militärischen Kräfte durch die Heerespflichtigen Belgiens verstärken will, und ferner wird eine solche massenhafte, jede wirtschaftliche Rücksicht bei Seite setzende Abschiebung der Heerespflichtigen zu einer Beunruhigung in der Bevölkerung führen, die im Zusammenhang mit anderen Massnahmen schliesslich den Bogen überspannen muss und Explosionen hervorrufen wird, die, ganz abgesehen davon, ob man sie unterdrücken kann, zu Verhältnissen führen werden, die ich nicht *verantworten kann und will*.

Dass bei solchen rigorosen Massnahmen die Zufuhr der *Lebensmittel aus Übersee* augenblicklich aufhören wird, ist nur nebenbei hervorzuheben; bedeutungsvoller ist die Wahrscheinlichkeit, dass infolge der Beunruhigung der gesamten Bevölkerung vor allen Dingen aber der Arbeiter, Massenstriche auszuschreien und die für unsere Heereszwecke und für Deutschlands Nutzen hier in Belgien durch belgische Arbeiter ausgeführten Arbeiten und Produkte nicht mehr hergestellt werden können. Das hat nicht nur höchst unliebsame praktische Folgen, sondern auch politische, denn durch die Erzeugnisse der hier in Belgien hergestellten Arbeiten sollen die politischen Beziehungen zum neutralen Auslande (2) gestärkt werden und durch die jetzt ganz besonders zu erhörende Kohlenförderung auch unsern Bundesgenossen zu Gute kommen. Ferner ist doch zu überlegen, dass eine solche Massenabschiebung und die Absicht, die Abschiebenden in Deutsch-

*land als Arbeiter sei es für die Industrie oder für Heereszwecke, zu verwenden*, in Deutschland selbst gar keinen Nutzen schaffen werden, denn die so zwangswise abgeschobenen Arbeiter werden an der Arbeitsstelle die Arbeit verweigern und ich weiss kein Mittel, wenigstens keines, welches einen *Kulturstaat zu Gebote steht, um die die Arbeit Verweigenden zu einer wirklich fruchtbringenden und nützlichen Arbeit zu zwingen*. Deshalb wird eine solche massenhafte Abschiebung lediglich so und soweit tausend mehr *Fresser* nach Deutschland bringen und die Arbeiternot nach wie vor bestehen bleiben. Wenn man aber die Anwerbung mit den Hilfsmitteln, die ich zur Verfügung stellen will, und wenn man die zwangswise Verbringung von widerwilligen Arbeitern zur Arbeitsstelle in der Weise anwendet, wie ich es hervorgehoben habe, so glaube ich, dass es mehr wie bisher möglich sein wird genügend Arbeitskräfte aus Belgien, für Deutschland verwendbar zu machen.

Dies mag genügen, um diese Frage als für mich erschöpfend genug behandelt anzusehen.

Zu 2 Mit der gewiss auch von mir als notwendig erkannten Verringerung der Arbeiternot in Deutschland durch Zuführung brauchbarer Arbeitswillingiger aus den besetzten Gebieten, hängt deshalb die Ernährung der belgischen Bevölkerung zusammen, weil die Klagen wiederholt ausgesprochen worden sind, dass die Anwerbung freiwilliger Arbeiter hier in Belgien deshalb so unzureichend ausfällt, ja sogar die belgischen Arbeiter wieder aus Deutschland nach Belgien zurückdrängen, *weil die belgischen Arbeiter hier besser ernährt würden*, wie es in Deutschland möglich ist.

Ich bitte den Grafen Rantzau (1), diese Anschuldigungen und Klagen zurückzuweisen und die tatsächlichen Verhältnisse darzustellen. Dabei wird die Rationierung, die Massregeln, welche hier getroffen worden sind, um die Ernährungsmittel Belgiens nicht nur für die Reicher und Wohlhabenderen leicht zur Verfügung zu stellen, sondern um auch die ärmere Bevölkerung und namentlich die Arbeiter vor Hungersnot zu schützen, auszuführen sein und es wird von mir für wichtig erachtet werden darüber Klarheit zu schaffen, durch welche Einrichtungen es hier in Belgien möglich, ja sogar notwendig ist, um, sei es rationiert, sei es unrationiert, gewisse Lebensmittelprodukte von dem Einzelnen oder von Vereinigungen, von Gemeinden kaufen zu können. Das klar zu stellen, wird schon deshalb wichtig sein, weil in der von mir bereits erwähnten telegraphischen Mitteilung der Obersten Heeresleitung und des Generalfeldmarschalls von Hindenburg folgendes ausgeführt ist :

“ Was die Ernährung der belgischen Bevölkerung anbetrifft, so ist die Mitteilung, dass die belgische Arbeiterbevölkerung nicht besser rationiert ist, als die deutsche Bevölkerung, für mich sehr wertvoll, da in Deutschland hierüber recht falsche Gerichte im Umlauf sind, die neben Besserstellung der belgischen Zivilbevölkerung auf den Vorteil hinweisen, dass die ärmste Bevölkerung in Belgien im Stande ist, sich neben der zugeteilten Ration Verpflegung zuzukaufen, sofern und soweit sie von der Commission oder dem Comité National Geldunterstützung erhält ” (2).

(1) In November 1917, count von Rantzau-Rastorf is again president of the Zentral Ernährungskommission. The Governor-General had chosen him, on September 24th, 1916 as one of the delegates of the conference held, on September 28th, 1916 in the Ministry of War, in Berlin, together with his Chief of Staff, Major-General von Winterfeldt, Councillor Kaufmann, Dr. von Sandt, Chief of the Civil Administration and Major Baron von der Lancken, Chief of the Political Section.

(2) This paragraph is marked with a red line in the margin.  
(1) The General Governor has replaced this word by *gefährliche* (dangerous).  
(2) In the margin, in the Governor-General's hand-writing: Switzerland, Austria (A), Denmark. The (A) was crossed out by von Bissing.

Aus diesen Sätzen geht hervor, dass trotz meiner Ausführungen, die ich *schriftlich und mündlich* dem Generalfeldmarschall von Hindenburg gemacht habe, er mir weniger glaubt wie den Mitteilungen, die er vermutlich aus solchen industriellen Kreisen bekommen hat, die mit Neid oder aus anderen Gründen scheel auf meine Verwaltungsart sehen, und es wird dabei von Herrn Graf zu Rantzau scharf zu betonen sein, dass eine doppelte Rationierung namentlich durch Rationen und ausserdem durch Geldunterstützung, verboten ist und gerade wenn letzteres namentlich festgestellt ist und dadurch die Arbeitswilligkeit untergraben wird, ich die Masseregeln treffe, die ich bereits bei dem Abschießungsverfahren der Arbeitsunwilligen hervorgehoben habe. In einem in gleicher Beziehung an den Staatssekretär des Innern gerichteten Schreiben habe ich gleiche unbestimmte Klagen als ganz unbegründet zurückgewiesen und ich bin auch in diesem Schreiben auf die Tätigkeit der Commission for Relief und des amerikanischen Hülfskomitees eingegangen und habe sowohl auf die Vorteile, wie auf die Nachteile dieser Tätigkeit hingewiesen. Dabei habe ich an der Auffassung festhalten müssen, dass, da nun einmal die Zufuhr von Lebensmitteln aus Uebersee besteht, und ich seiner Zeit sowohl von der Reichsregierung wie von der Obersten Heeresleitung gerade zu mit den beweglichsten Worten dazu veranlasst wurde, die Abmachungen mit den Protektoren des Hülfswerks so zu treffen, wie sie jetzt gehalten werden müssen, ich keine Veranlassung habe, *die Abmachungen zu brechen*, vielmehr hieß ich es für durchaus nützlich aber auch politisch notwendig, die Uebelstände, welche mit der Lebensmittelzufuhr aus Uebersee gewiss zusammenhängen, in Kauf zu nehmen und es der Zukunft und der rigorosen Massregeln Englands zu überlassen *die Zufuhr zu sperren, damit England als schuldiger Teil beim Aufhören der Lebensmittelzufuhr durch das amerikanische Hülfswerk angesehen werden kann* (1).

Über die Vorteile, welche tatsächlich das amerikanische Hülfswerk nicht nur für Belgien, sondern für meine Okkupationsstruppen allein schon durch die Einzelankäufe und schliesslich auch direkt für Deutschland bietet, wird am besten wohl Herr von der Lancken (2) oder Herr Bruhn (3) die klarsten Mitteilungen machen können.

Seine Majestät der Kaiser und König, wie ich schon wiederholt hervorgehoben habe, hat mit die Verwaltung des Landes durch eine Kabinettsorder übertragen, in der er mich vollständig selbstständig und verantwortlich allein gegen ihn macht. Solange der Kaiser daran festhält, dass die Ausübung der gesamten Staatsgewalt mir allein zufällt, solange muss ich jede Einmischung in die von mir getroffenen Massnahmen zurückweisen (4) und ich muss deshalb auch über die Art und den Zeitpunkt der bis ins Kleinste durchgeführten Rationierung nach etwaigem Aufhören der amerikanischen Lieferungen die Entscheidung mir ebenso vorbehalten wie den Entschluss, die Abmachungen mit den Schirmherren des amerikanischen Hülfswerks zu beseitigen. Es zeigt mindestens ein vollständiges Verkennen der heisigen Verhältnisse, wenn man diese vollständig gleich mit den in Deutschland befindlichen wollte. Ganz abgesehen davon, dass jedenfalls bis zum 1. Oktober die Lebensmittelverteilung und Versorgung

in Deutschland sehr verschieden war und auch noch verschieden bleiben wird, so ist es ganz anders in einem *patriotisch gesinnten, für seine Erziehung kämpfenden Lande, Anordnungen rigoroser Art treffen zu können, als in einem Lande, das dem Okkupanten jede Schwierigkeit macht*, die nur möglich ist, um seine Anordnungen zu umgehen und der Okkupant nicht die Mittel besitzt, um bis aufs kleinste die so schwierig zu überwachenden Lebensmittelvorschriften durchsetzen zu lassen. Es muss nur hervorgehoben werden, dass in Belgien eine Polizei, Organe derselben wie Gendarmen u. s. w. nicht vorhanden sind und dass durch die starke *Verringierung meiner Okkupationsmaßnahmen* es immer fraglicher wird, ob die namentlich in den ländlichen Bezirken ausgeführten polizeilichen und wirtschaftlichen Aufsichtsmassnahmen durch die Landsturmleute als Kontrollleute oder wie man sie nennet, ausgeführt werden können. Ja in den, die Landsturmleute von wirtschaftlichen Hülfsleistungen nach Möglichkeit zu befreien.

Unter allen Umständen muss in den Sitzungen, denen die Herren ja beiwohnen wollen, mit genügender Klarheit und rücksichtloser Schärfie dieser mein Standpunkt geltend gemacht werden und ferner, dass ich nur so lange das schwere Amt weiter verwahren werde, so lange ich die Überzeugung haben kann, dass Seine Majestät der Kaiser und König mir nach wie vor das mich so ehrende Vertrauen schenkt, und wenn es Herren oder Leute gibt, die an meiner Verwaltung Kritik üben wollen und glauben, es tun zu müssen, so mögen sie an die entscheidende Stelle gehen, um ehrlich und ohne Hinterhalt den Generalgouverneur bei der entscheidenden Stelle zu verklagen, aber fortwährende Beunruhigung in seine schwierige Aufgabe zu bringen, ist nicht die Art, wie man Arbeitsfreudigkeit erreicht und wie man auch hier und da Wünsche, die vielleicht beachtenswert sind, zur Ausführung bringt. Namentlich ist es unbedingt eine nach meiner Auffassung unerquickliche Erscheinung, dass auf Rederien unverantwortlicher und unorientierter Persönlichkeiten Stimmungen, weniger im Volke als bei Leuten, die diesen Persönlichkeiten Gehör schenken, entstehen und es ist geradezu für mich bitter und so schmerzlich als möglich, wenn man offen oder auch so versteckt wie es nur irgend geht, den Verdacht aufkommen lässt, als ob ich Eigenbrödelei hier trieb, die Belger als meine Schosskinder behandelte und Deutschland in jeder Beziehung vernachlässigen wollte.

Es ist mir geraten worden in dieser Depesche, die ich schon oft erwähnt habe, die Flucht in die Öffentlichkeit und die Presse in Anspruch zu nehmen, um über die Ernährungsverhältnisse Belgiens die sogenannte Stimmung in Deutschland aufzuklären und zu bessern. Ich kann doch unmöglich als Generalgouverneur mich mit Herstellung von Zeitungsatikeln befassen, ausserdem habe ich gestern erst einen ganz verständigen, wenn auch natürlich nicht erschöpfenden Artikel über die Ernährung in Belgien gelesen. Mögen sich doch die, die solches Interesse an der Ernährung Belgiens haben, durch die bisher erschienenen und vielleicht jetzt im Entstehen begriffenen Ausführungen diejenige Kenntnis verschaffen, die sie wünschen. Ich bin aber auch garnicht in der Lage, bzw. wäre es ein Fehler, wenn ich die Ernährungsfrage Belgiens in breiterster Weise behandeln wollte oder behandeln lassen wollte, denn sowie dies geschah, würden die Protektoren Einspruch nach dieser und jener Richtung hin erheben und würde man schliesslich auch bei den Neutralen und England vor allen Dingen der Meinung sein, dass die knappe *Ernährung Belgiens lediglich dem*

(1) These lines are underlined in red in the document.

(2) Chief of the Political Abteilung.

(3) Name quoted in the *Personal-Ubersicht in der Zivilbehörde* of 1917. In September 1916, Hauptmann Bruhn belonged to the Political Section.

(4) The words in italics are underlined in red in the document.

*zuzuschreiben sei, dass versteckt und widerrechtlich eine Menge Nahrungsmittel nach Deutschland gebracht wurden und da muss ich gestehen, meine Herren, dass ich nicht ein ganz eines Gewissen habe und dass tatsächlich in dieser Beziehung manche Freiheiten gestattet worden sind, die ja vielleicht von demjenigen Herrn, der über die Ernährungsverhältnisse nähere Auskunft geben soll, auch streifender Weise behauptet werden können.*

G.

EXTRACT FROM THE REVIEW « LE CORRESPONDANT »

N° 1393, October 10th 1920 (pages 162-168)

Confidential letter of Governor-General Baron von Bissing to Field-Marshal von Hindenburg. (1)

VERTRAULICH

25 November 1916.

Euerer Excellenz  
danke ich ergebenst für das an mich gerichtete Schreiben vom 15. dieses Monats, aus welchem ich mit Freude entnommen habe, dass die Gedanken, die ich aus der telegraphischen Aufforderung vom 11. ds. Ms. die Abschiebung der für Deutschland bestimmten Arbeiter betreffend, herauslesen zu müssen glaubte, Euerer Excellenz fern gelegen haben.  
Mittlerweile scheinen in der Heimat neue Schwierigkeiten entstanden zu sein, da ich am 2-II., 3-II. und 11-II-16 von verschiedenen Seiten die Aufforderung erhielt, nicht 20,000 Arbeiter wöchentlich, wie dies von hier ordnungsgemäss eingeleitet und sichergestellt war, sondern nur 8,000 Arbeiter abzuschieben; ich bedauere diese abormalige Verzögerung in der von Euerer Excellenz ebenso wie von mir erstrebten Beseitigung der in Deutschland herrschenden Arbeiternot und ich hoffe, dass die von Euerer Excellenz anerkannten Uebelstände in Deutschland, und die dadurch erforderlich gewordenen sich schnell aufeinander folgenden Abänderungen der von mir vorbereiteten Massnahmen nicht weiter den Zufuss belgischer Arbeiter verzögern werden. Nicht nur in dieser nach verschiedenen Richtungen so wichtigen Frage, sondern auch bei allen für die siegreiche Durchführung des Krieges wichtigen Massnahmen, welche ich als selbständiger Verwalter des mir von Seiner Majestät anvertrauten Okkupationsgebietes zu treffen habe, würdige ich voll und ganz, dass Euerer Excellenz sich für verpflichtet halten, darauf hinzuwirken, dass alle nützlichen Kräfte und alle Willensanspannung zusammengefasst werden damit der Siegeswillle lebendig bleibt und zu solchen Taten führt welche einen ehrenvollen, den gebrauchten Optimum entsprechenden Frieden gewährleisten. Für jeden, der an verantwortlicher Stelle bereit und berufen ist, Eure Excellenz in Ihrer so schweren aber doch so ehrenvollen Aufgabe zu unterstützen, sind Selbstständigkeit und Arbeitsfreudigkeit notwendig; letztere ist vor allem in Frage gestellt, wenn Zweifel an der Bereitwilligkeit bei den grossen Aufgaben mitspielen, laut werden, oder wenn man Beweggründe des Handelns annimmt, welche einer Pflichtverletzung gleichkämen.

(1) The words in italics have been underlined by General von Bissing.

Gelegentlich der Verhandlungen über die Belgien aufzuerlegenden Kriegskontribution hat der Kriegsminister in einem mir von ihm in Abschrift (1) zugeleiteten Schreiben meine pflichtgemäß erhobenen Bedenken gegen eine überrитетe hohne Richtigstellung in meinem an den Herrn Stellvertreter des Reichskanzlers gerichteten Schreiben vom 12. ds. Ms. nötigte. Bei der Frage der Ernährung des von mir verwalteten Gebietes hat der Herr Generalintendant des Feldheeres in einer Verhandlung des Kriegsernährungsamtes Aussserungen getan, die mir Unterlassungen und Verfehlungen vorwarf, gegen welche ich mit allem Nachdruck in dem abschriftlich beigefügten Schreiben (2) vom 21. ds. Ms. Stellung genommen habe. Ich will andere ähnliche Aussserungen Untergebener Euerer Excellenz, die mir durch die Berichte meiner Vertreter zu Ohren gekommen sind, übergeben, um Euerer Excellenz kostbare Zeit nicht zu lange in Anspruch zu nehmen.

In den Verhandlungen ist aber ferner die Ansicht geäussert worden, dass die Belgier bis jetzt zu gänzlich davon gekommen seien, und dass eine Erhöhung der Kontribution schon deshalb erwünscht sei, um die Kriegsnidigkeit bei den Belgern zu steigern. Dieser Ansicht haben Euer Excellenz in der Depesche vom 16. ds. Ms. G. Q. Nr. 35572 Ausdruck gegeben, in der Euer Excellenz mich aufforderten, Belgien zu den Lasten des Krieges in so erheblichem Masse heranzuziehen, dass im Lande der Wunsch nach Frieden gewaltsam hervorbreche und das Land nach dem Kriege goldwirtschaftlich möglichst geschwächt werde.

Diese Ansicht gibt mir Veranlassung Euerer Excellenz über die Lage in Belgien und über die von mir befohlte Politik eine kurze Aufklärung zu geben.  
Als Seine Majestät der Kaiser und König mich zum Verwalter des grössten Teiles Belgiens berief, hat er mir die Aufgabe übertragen, Belgien für die Interessen Deutschlands nutzbar zu machen, zugleich aber die Ordnung im Lande wieder herzustellen und aufrecht zu erhalten. Allerhöchst derselbe hat mir aber ausser diesen Aufgaben auch noch ausdrücklich aufgegeben, soziale Politik zu treiben und für alle von mir zu treffenden Massnahmen die volle Verantwortung allein Seiner Majestät gegenüber zu übernehmen. Ich habe dieser Aufforderung nach verschiedenen Richtungen hin entsprochen; aber auch die Erfüllung meiner Aufgaben auf die Zukunft gerichtet, auf eine Zukunft, die natürlich von den militärischen Erfolgen abhängig ist. Nur eine gerechte, die Ordnung im Lande erhaltenende, auf die Lebensfähigkeit des Landes gerichtete Politik hat mit dazu beigetragen, dass Belgien ein erwünschter und nutzbringender Machtzuwachs Deutschlands nach dem Frieden werden kann. Lediglich mit Abschreckungs- und Vergeltungsmaßregeln, die durch die Vorgänge bei Beginn des Krieges wohl erklärlig waren, ist kein Volk auf die Dauer zu regieren. Für mich galt es, zwischen solchen Massregeln und einer zu milden Behandlung auf Grund pflichtgemässer und praktischer Erwägungen einen Mittelweg zu finden, um die verfügbaren oder zu schaffenden Kräfte und Hilfsmittel des besetzten Gebietes für das Deutsche Interesse nutzbar zu machen.

Ich durfte weder den Gefühlen der Vergeltung nachgeben, noch danach

(1) We do not possess this enclosure and the one mentioned below (Note of the translator).

(2) See note 1.

streben, die Liebe des Volkes zu gewinnen. Mir muss es genug sein, wenn ich mir die Achtung erworben habe. Man erkennt immer mehr an, dass ich Gerechtigkeit zu üben bemüht bin.

Stets habe ich bei allen Handlungen auch derjenigen Art, die dem belgischen Lande zum Nutzen gereichen sollte, abgewogen und zwar auf gewissehafteste Art, ob die Erfolge meiner Handlungen Deutschland augenblicklich oder auch für die Zukunft von Nutzen sein könnte.

Das Urteil meines allergnädigsten Kaisers wird entscheiden, ob ich seinen Auftrage gemäss gehandelt habe, wenn ich deutsche soziale Einrichtungen, deutsche Fürsorge für Arme und Kranke und deutsche Energie bei allen den Veranstaltungen, die die Produktionsfähigkeit des Landes verstärken sollte, zur Geltung brachte. Diese Produktionsfähigkeit war selbstverständlich bei Handel und Industrie bald erschöpft. Denn wie Euer Excellenz wissen, waren die Rohstoffe Deutschland zur Verfügung zu stellen und ein Import nach Belgien infolge der Ablehnung Englands undenkbar. Umsomehr hatte ich die Pflicht, die Landwirtschaft zu heben und dafür zu sorgen, dass sie auch bei Unterbrechung der Zufuhr aus Uebersee, wenn auch mit Not, die belgische Bevölkerung unter Anwendung der weitestgehenden Sparsamkeit ernähren könnte.

Die blütenden Felder, die allmälich mit Jungvieh und Fohlen sich wiederbelebenden Weiden mögen dazu beigetragen haben, dass die durch Belgien durchreisenden zahlreichen Deutschen und Bewohner auch anderer Länder zu der Überzeugung gebracht wurden, in Belgien herrsche Überfluss. Oberflächliche Beurteilung hat aber nicht allein hier, sondern auch anderwärts zu falschen Schlüssen geführt. Daraus, dass Brüssel und auch einige andere Städte einen den Friedenszuständen ähnlichen Eindruck hervorriefen und daran, dass der wohlhabende Teil ihrer Bewohner nur dem Vergnügen und der Befriedigung der angeboarten Néigung zum Wohlleben nachgehen, kann nicht gefolgert werden, dass der Krieg an diesen Städten spurlos vorüber gegangen ist. Man blickt nicht in die Städtchen der Armut, dort, wo seit Beginn der Okkupation eine ganz andere Bedürftigkeit herrschte, wie in Deutschland. Aber auch in den wohlhabenden Kreisen hat man schon immer die Schwere des Krieges so empfunden dass das Friedensbedürfnis sich immer mehr steigerte; auf dem Lande dagegen hat infolge meiner Verwaltung eine ruhigere zum Teile zufriedenere Stimmung geherrscht.

Man glaubte nicht, dass Belgien wiederum Kriegsschauplatz werden könnte, als aber im Juni d. J. die starke Offensive der Franzosen und Engländer einzetzte und übertriebene Nachrichten von angeblichen Erfolgen unserer Feinde Grauen bei den Belgern fanden, brach sich bei diesen die Erkenntnis Bahn, welche Folgen ein Zurückdrängen der deutschen Front für das Land haben müsste. Die hierdurch hervorgerufenen Befürchtungen wurden durch die deutsche Heereskraft unbedingt notwendigen Massnahmen verstärkt. Pferde, Maschinen und die noch vorhandenen Rohstoffe wurden weggenommen. Auf die Abrechnung von bisher zu meinem Befehlsbereich gehörigen Gebietsteilen und die Unterbrechung jeglichen Verkehrs mit diesen Gebietsstellen, ferner die Abschüttung grösserer Massen von Arbeitslosen und die wachsende Not der ärmeren Volkschichten haben bei den Belgern zweitieilos eine grosse Kriegsmüdigkeit hervorgerufen. Ich kann Euerer Excellenz versichern, dass der Wunsch nach Frieden in Belgien ganz allgemein ist, wenn man von wenigen Zwischenhändlern abstießt, also von Kreisen, die in allen kriegsführenden Ländern augenblicklich finanzielle Vorteile erzielen.

Die gesamte übrige Bevölkerung unter der Führung der leitenden Männer, der Finanz, der Industrie und des Handels, die einzigen wirklich massgebenden Persönlichkeiten die heute im Land Einfluss haben, sehnt sich nach dem Frieden und weiss, dass sich mit jedem Monat die Aussichten für die Zukunft verschlechtern. Die Geistlichkeit mit Kardinal Mercier an der Spitze hat mit der Aufpeitschung der Bewohner Belgie's zum Ueberpatriotismus weniger zur Kriegsfreudigkeit beigetragen, als zum Widerstand gegen die Massnahmen der verschwendtesten Art, welche namentlich in der letzten Zeit notwendig wurden. Neuerdings ist auch bei der Geistlichkeit trotzdem sie ihre Proteste nicht aufgibt, die Sehnsucht nach Beendigung des Krieges immer lebhafter geworden. Würden die Belgier, die sich hier im Land aufzuhalten zu bestimmen haben, so würde ein Frieden mit Belgien sicherlich zu erreichen sein. Ihr Einfluss auf die belgische Regierung ist aber gering, und deren Widerstand wird durch die Friedensreden im Deutschen Reichstag bedauerlicherweise noch gestärkt, vor allem wenn Redner wie Scheidemann sich nicht scheuen für ihre Auffassung die Stimmung im Schutzzengraben im Heere in Anspruch zu nehmen. Die Scheidemannschen Friedenswünsche werden selbstverständlich bei unseren Feinden aller Art als der Ausdruck deutscher Kriegsnüdigkeit angesehen. Unsere Feinde schliessen daraus, und dies tun die Belgier in besonderer Weise, dass ihnen auch im Falle einer Niederlage der ganze Landbesitz ungeschmälert erhalten bleibt. Die Friedenssehnsucht kann dadurch eher verringert werden, als wenn man weiss, dass bei der Fortsetzung des Krieges, bei einem ungünstigen Ausgang nicht nur weitere Verluste an Menschen eintreten, sondern auch das Land selbst verloren geht. Politisch scheint es mir überhaupt verfehlt auf Stimmungen Rücksicht zu nehmen. Wenn ich den verschiedenen Stimmungen, die in Deutschland sich in betreff Belgien geltend gemacht haben, Rechnung getragen hätte, so würde ich zwischen Extremen hin und her geschwankt haben und wenn ich auch dann noch die Stimmung im benachbarten Holland oder in dem uns nicht freundlich gesinnten Amerika in Erwägung gezogen hätte, dann hätte ich Fehler über Fehler begehen können.

Was nun die Stimmung im Heere anbelangt, so muss ich darüber ganz falsch unterrichtet sein. Ich habe geglaubt und glaube es auch noch, dass im Heere nur eine Stimmung herrscht: Der Siegeswillen und die Zuversicht, dass unser Hindenburg mit den Deutschen Heeren den Krieg siegreich und glorreich zu Ende führen wird. Ich kann mir nicht denken, dass das Heer Zeit und Neigung haben sollte, sich mit einer so schwierigen Aufgabe, wie der meiner Verwaltung zu beschäftigen. Das können nur solche Mitglieder des Heeres sein, die in volliger Unkenntnis der Verhältnisse und ohne Urteil über die von dem Verwalter dieses Landes getroffenen Massnahmen, sich fälschlich als Vertreter der Stimmung des Heeres bezeichnen. Auch sie werden vielleicht verleitet worden sein durch die Annehmlichkeiten, die ich auch deshalb geschaffen habe, um den aus den Schutzzengräben kommenden Offizieren und Mannschaften Zerstreuung und Erfolg zuteil werden zu lassen. Ich kann mir auch nicht denken, dass bei den nach 1000 zahlenden Mannschaften, die von der Westfront nach Hause eilen, gegen meine Verwaltung dadurch *Misstimmung* hervorgerufen wurde, dass meine Vorkommnisse ihnen die Gelegenheit gaben, ein Zehrhort und Geschenke für die Heimat mitzunehmen. Wenn ich auch in meine vorsorglichen Massnahmen und Einrichtungen, die ich hier im Deutschen Interesse getroffen habe, im einzelnen nicht

näher eingehe, so möchte ich doch kurz darauf hinweisen was aus Belgien während meiner bisherigen Verwaltung herausgeholt worden ist:

Die Kriegskontributionen, die bisher insgesamt in Höhe von 1,020 Milliarden Franken bezahlt worden sind, stellen nur einen Teil dessen dar, was Belgien zu der deutschen Kriegsführung beigetragen hat. Was allein an Requisitionen ohne Bezahlung und an beschlagnahmten Waren aller Art, die nur durch Gutschrift des Gegenwertes in Deutschland bezahlt werden, Belgien entnommen worden ist, kann auf rund 800 Millionen Franken geschätzt werden. Auch was sonst an Waren und Werten aller Art in Belgien angekauft, und der belgischen Wirtschaft gegen Begleichung des Wertbetrages entzogen wurde, hat für die Kriegsführung Deutschland eine sehr bedeutende Rolle geführt. Als Beispiel führe ich die Ankäufe der ZEG (1) an, die bisher für gegen 100 Millionen Franken eingekauft hat, ferner der Flachs-EG (2), die für über 80 Millionen Franken eingekauft hat und die Pferde-Requisitionen, durch die bisher 93,000 Pferde dem Lande entnommen sind, die in den letzten 9 Monaten im Durchschnitt mit 1,533 Mark bezahlt worden sind, also ungefähr 500 Mark unter dem Marktwerte. Hätten diese Pferde und diese Waren, für die insgesamt 360 Millionen Franken bezahlt worden sind, aus dem neutralen Auslande bezogen werden müssen, vorausgesetzt, dass dies überhaupt möglich gewesen wäre, so hätten hierfür bedeutend grössere Beträge ausgezahlt werden müssen und zwar in ausländischer Valuta, wodurch der schon stark gedrückte Kurs der deutschen Valuta noch weiter geschädigt worden wäre.

Auf rein finanziellem Gebiete liegen die Ankäufe in Belgien von neutralen Wertpapieren aller Art, die dem Reich zugeführt werden und diesen an Stelle des Goldes zur Bezahlung der Einfuhr aus dem neutralen Auslande dienen. Auch die Kohleausfuhr aus Belgien kommt auf ähnliche Weise dem Reich zugute, da die Kohlen in Belgien mit deutschen Noten bezahlt werden, während die durch die Ausfuhr geschaffenen Forderungen im Auslande der Reichsbank zur Verfügung gestellt werden.

Gewiss sind durch diese Ankäufe dem mir unterstellten Gebiete bediente Zahlungsmittel zugeführt worden; diese haben dazu gedient, das Land zahlungsfähig zu erhalten. Sie haben es so nicht nur ermöglicht, die Kontribution in international kursfähigen Gelde zu erheben, sondern auch durch Überführung der angesammelten Beträge an Marknoten, sowie durch Abführung der flüssigen Mittel Zwangsverwaltert, den Banken und Unternehmungen in Deutschland bedeutende Guthaben zu schaffen. Diese belaufen sich heute auf annähernd 800 Millionen Franken und bilden ein wertvolles Pfand in unserer Hand.

Es sind also tatsächlich bisher über 2 1/2 Milliarden Franken an Geld und an nicht bezahlten Werten aus Belgien unmittelbar an Deutschland abgeführt worden, und weit über 1/2 Milliarde sind gegen Bezahlung an Pferden, Vieh, Wagen und Werten aller Art Deutschland und dem Heere zugute gekommen.

Trotzdem wird es, wie ich hoffe, möglich sein, jetzt eine auf 50 Millionen monatlich erhöhte Kriegskontribution weiterhin zu finanzieren und auch noch Belgien auf andere Weise finanziell zu den Kosten der deutschen Kriegsführung heranzuziehen und zwar entsprechend der von Euerer Excellenz im *Telegramm* vom 16. ds. Mts. ausgesprochenen *Erwartung*.

ung. Schaid nämlich die Finanzierung der neu auferlegten Kriegskontribution gesichert ist, wird mit der Abführung der unter Zwangsvorwaltung stehenden Barguthaben feindlicher Angehöriger nach Deutschland begonnen werden. Diese belaufen sich auf 383 Millionen Franken, wozu noch die *Guthaben* landflüchtiger Belger in Höhe von 68 Millionen Franken kommen. Es wird möglich sein von diesen *Barguthaben* im Laufe der nächsten Monate etwa 250 Millionen Franken nach Deutschland zu überführen, also monatlich durchschnittlich gegen 30 Millionen Franken, sodass *Belgien* tatsächlich nicht 50 Millionen Franken, sondern rund 80 Millionen Franken monatlich nach Deutschland zahlen wird.

Wenn von verschiedenen Seiten darauf hingewiesen wird, dass Belgien zu sehr geschont werde und lange nicht im gleichen Verhältnis wie Deutschland selber unter dem Kriege leidet, so stimmen diese Behauptungen nicht mit den Tatsachen überein. Die Quelle des belgischen Reichstums ist seine Industrie, die fast völlig auf der Einfuhr von Rohstoffen und auf der Ausfuhr ihrer Erzeugnisse angewiesen ist. Die Industrie ist daher mit ganz wenigen Ausnahmen völlig brach gelegt. Überdies sind und werden im grossen Umfange Maschinen aus den Fabriken beschlagnahmt, die Arbeiter werden abgeführt. Die belgische Industrie wird sich nach dem Kriege neu einrichten müssen, und läuft die Gefahr nicht mehr über hinreichende Arbeitskräfte zu verfügen oder jedenfalls mit viel teureren Arbeitskräften arbeiten zu müssen, wenn die nach Deutschland geschafften Arbeiter gute Löhne erhalten und infolgedessen auch späterhin höhere Ansprüche stellen werden. Nur um eine Ziffer zu nennen, erwähne ich, dass in einer amerikanischen Zeitschrift, die der belgischen Industrie entstandenen Schäden und Verluste auf 5 Milliarden Franken geschätzt werden. Wenn auch diese Summe übertrieben sein mag, so muss doch diese Schätzung denjenigen zu denken geben, die von dem geschätzten Belgien sprechen. Zu gleicher Zeit wächst die Verschuldung Belgiens an das Ausland täglich an. Die belgische Regierung führt mit ausländischen Krediten Krieg, die das Land schwer belasten werden, ebenso beruht die Nahrungsmittelinfuhr auf Krediten, die der Regierung in Le Havre eingeräumt worden sind. Die dadurch allein während des Krieges eingetretene Steigerung der Verschuldung Belgiens an das Ausland kann auf über 2 Milliarden Franken geschätzt werden.

Wenn es trotz der äußerst ungünstigen wirtschaftlichen Lage des Landes gelingen ist, dauernd ganz erhebliche Beträge herauszu ziehen und wenn das auch, wie ich dargelegt habe, für die Zukunft auch weiter der Fall sein kann, so war und ist das überhaupt nur möglich auf Grund eines ganz plannmässigen Vorgehens und einer wohlgedachten Finanzpolitik. Nur dadurch war es zu erreichen, dass Ruhe und Ordnung herrschte und dass das Publikum wieder Vertrauen fasste zu den Banken und sein Vermögen bei den Banken behiess.

Wirtschaftlich ist die Lage *Belgiens* ähnlich wie die Nordfrankreiche. Es ist erklärlich, dass es nicht möglich war, die gleichen Zustände in Nordfrankreich zu schaffen, wie hier in Belgien. Ein Vergleich zwischen den geleisteten Leistungen der beiden Gebiete zeigt, welche Früchte die in Belgien betriebene Politik getragen hat. In Nordfrankreich sind bisher insgesamt nur 320 Millionen Franken an Kontributionen auferlegt worden, die zum grössten Teil in unterwertigen Stadtgeldern bezahlt worden sind. Belgien hätte, wenn man das Verhältnis der Einwohnerzahl zu Grunde legt, dementsprechend 820 Millionen Franken an Kontributionen

(1) Short for Central-Pinkaufs-Gesellschaft (Central Purchasing Company). This Company seems to have bought specially mfr's such as steel, copper, tin, etc.  
(2) Short for Flachs-Einkaufs-Gesellschaft (Flax Purchasing Company).

zu zahlen gehabt. Es hat aber tatsächlich 1,020 Millionen Franken gezahlt, und wird jetzt weiterhin die erhöhte Kontribution in international kursfähigem Gelde zahlen, was in Nordfrankreich wohl ausgeschlossen sein dürfte. An eine Abführung von Barguthaben bei Banken in Nordfrankreich ist gar nicht zu denken.

Die mir unterstellten Behörden haben die Aufgaben, dauernd darauf hinzuarbeiten, alle Mittel des Landes im Interesse der Kriegsführung des Deutschen Reiches anzuspannen, und wo es geht, neue Quellen zu erschliessen, um die Lasten des Reiches zu vermindern. Ich habe dem Generalkommissar für die Banken, der in erster Linie dazu berufen ist, die finanzielle Ausnutzung Belgiens zu betreiben, beauftragt, einen eingehenden Bericht über die bisherigen geldlichen und wirtschaftlichen Leistungen des Landes vorzubereiten und auch Vorschläge wegen der Heranziehung Belgiens in der Zukunft zu unterbreiten.

Ich hoffe, dass Euere Excellenz mir Gerechtigkeit widerfahren lassen und auch mir Hilfe leisten werden, Angriffe, die auf voller Unkenntnis der Verhältnisse beruhen, zurückzuweisen. Ich habe, wie ich das in Pless Euerer Excellenz treu, ehrlich und in Bewunderung Euer Excellenz ausprach, nur ein Bestreben, durch meine Art der Verwaltung, die ich als die eines sparsamen Haushalters aufgefasst habe, für die Zeit der Not die Hilfe auch Euerer Excellenz gewähren zu können die Ihnen erwünscht erscheint und für Deutschlands Durchhalten notwendig geworden ist. Euere Excellenz werden mir nicht absprechen können, dass ich trotz mancher Bedenken, die ich hier und da gehabt habe, rücksichtslos allen militärischen Anforderungen entsprochen habe, die Euer Excellenz für richtig und notwendig mir gegenüber bezeichneten, und wenn Seine Majestät mir die Verwaltung des Landes noch weiter anvertraut, so gebe ich meine Versicherung, dass ich ebenso, wie in der Vergangenheit auch in der Zukunft nur deutsches Interesse im Auge haben werde, selbst wenn es schliesslich zu einer Politik der äussersten Ausnutzung des Landes gegenüber dem bisherigen System der Sparsamkeit kommen müsste.

(*Gez.*) von Bissing.  
Generaloberst.